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THE MAGAZINE OF  
**Fantasy & Science Fiction**  
JUNE

THE DEVIL OF MALKIRK by Charles Sheffield  
George Alec Effinger  
Barry Malzberg  
Ron Goulart



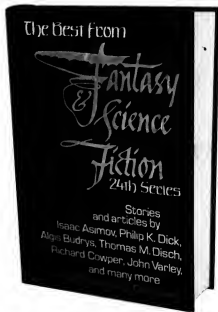
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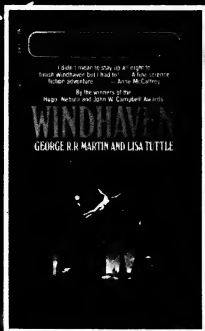
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119

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## NOVELLA

THE DEVIL OF MALKIRK 7 Charles Sheffield

## SHORT STORIES

OPENING NIGHT 59 George Alec Effinger

FLORA 83 B. L. Keller

THE KRISHMAN CUBE 96 Bruce P. Rogers

BLAIR HOUSE 109 Barry N. Malzberg

THE CHAINS OF THE SEA 120 Richard Mueller

BLOCKBUSTER 147 Ron Goulart

## ARTICLE

SORRY, BUT— 73 Anthony Boucher and  
J. Francis McComas

## DEPARTMENTS

EDITORIAL 5

BOOKS 52 Barry N. Malzberg

THE TRAGIC TALE OF MAD  
TOM (verse) 71 Russell M. Griffin

FILMS: Electric Granny, 117 Baird Searles  
Eclectic Alice

SCIENCE: Four Hundred Octaves 137 Isaac Asimov

INDEX TO VOLUME 62 162

CARTOONS: JOSEPH FARRIS (51), L. J. KOPF (146)

COVER BY RON WALOTSKY FOR "THE DEVIL OF MALKIRK"

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## Editorial: Profile of an F&SF reader

Recently, for the first time in a number of years, we sent a questionnaire to subscribers and compiled a reader profile from the results. A total of 10,000 questionnaires were mailed, and 3,000 replies were received; we thought you'd be interested in the results:

1. Sex: Male 65%  
Female 35

The last survey was 71 - 29.

2. Age: Under 18 4.6%  
18-22 8.0  
23-30 28.4  
31-45 39.9  
46-60 13.0  
over 60 7.1

Here we show the most drastic change from the last survey. Last time 23% of the respondents were under 18 and 53% under 30. We still have a young, primarily under 45 audience, but we wonder what has happened to the large percentage of teen-age readers. We would like to think that they are starting with other publications and will graduate to F&SF rather than consider the dreary possibility that they are not reading at all.

3. Education: High school 14.1%  
Some college 28.0  
College degree 21.5  
Some graduate school 12.0  
Graduate school degree 25.0

The above reflects a healthy increase in your education, which ties in with the increase in age. We are most impressed by the fact that 25% of you have graduate school degrees.

4. Income: Under \$10,000 11%  
10-20,000 26  
21-30,000 27  
31-40,000 15  
over 40,000 19

This compares very favorably with the few other magazine surveys that we've seen.

5. Occupation:	Professional, managerial	30%
	Scientist, engineer	19
	Student	12
	Teacher	10
	Office worker	9
	Writing, publishing	5
	Performing, creative arts	4
	Government, military	4
	Other	7

6. How many SF books do you buy each year?

Hardcover: 11

Paperback: 24

We suspected that our subscribers were voracious readers, but still we find these figures remarkable. In spite of escalating book prices, you still buy about two paperbacks and one hardcover each month. The latter is especially interesting in view of the fact that hardcover SF publishing seems to be going the way of the dinosaur.

7. Have you ever been to an SF convention?

Yes: 20%

No: 80

Still a large majority of readers who are not active fans.

We also asked questions about your reactions to the magazine, and we'll report on those results in an upcoming issue.

—EDWARD L. FERMAN



*Here is a wonderfully original and compelling tale about a doctor and a colonel who hear a dying man's story of sunken bullion and head into the Scottish highlands only to come up against a greater mystery. Charles Sheffield's forthcoming books include a collection, ERASMUS MAGISTER (which contains this story), and a novel, MY BROTHER'S KEEPER, both from Ace.*

# The Devil of Malkirk

BY  
CHARLES SHEFFIELD

**T**he spring evening was warm and still, and the sound of conversation carried far along the path from the open window of the house. It was enough to make the man walking the gravel surface hesitate, then turn his steps onto the lawn. He walked silently across the well-trimmed grass to the bay window, stooped, and peered through a gap in the curtains. A few moments more, and he returned to the path and entered the open door of the house.

Ignoring the servant waiting there, he turned left and went at once into the dining room. He looked steadily around him, while the conversation at the long table gradually died down.

"Dr. Darwin?" His voice was gruff and formal.

The eight men seated at dinner were silent for a moment, assessing the stranger. He was tall and gaunt, with a

dark, sallow complexion. Long years of intense sunlight had stamped a permanent frown across his brow, and a slight, continuous trembling of his hands spoke of other legacies of foreign disease. He returned the stares in silence.

After a few seconds one of the seated men pushed his chair back from the table.

"I am Erasmus — Darwin." The slight hesitation as he pronounced his name suggested a stammer more than any kind of contrived pause. "Who are you, and what is your business here?"

The speaker had risen to his feet as he spoke. He stepped forward and was revealed as grossly overweight, with heavy limbs and a fat, pock-marked face. He stood motionless, calmly awaiting the intruder's reply.

"Jacob Pole, at your service," said the stranger. Despite the warmth of the

April evening he was wearing a grey scarf of knitted wool, which he tightened now around his neck. "Colonel Jacob Pole of Litchfield. You and I are far afield tonight, Dr. Darwin, but we are neighbors. My house is no more than two miles from yours. As for my business, it is not of my choosing and I fear it may be a bad one. I am here to ask your urgent assistance on a medical matter at Bailey's Farm, not half a mile from this house."

There was a chorus of protesting voices from the table. A thin-faced man who wore no wig stood up and stepped closer.

"Colonel Pole, this is my house. I will forgive your entry to it uninvited and unannounced, since we understand that medical urgencies must banish formalities. But you interrupt more than a dinner among friends. I am Matthew Boulton, and tonight the Lunar Society meets here on serious matters. Mr. Priestley is visiting from Calne to tell of his latest researches on the new air. He is well begun, but by no means finished. Can your business wait an hour?"

Jacob Pole stood up straighter than ever. "If Disease could be made to wait, I would do the same. As it is ..." He turned to Darwin again. "I am no more than a messenger here, one who happened to be dining with Will Bailey. I have come at the request of Dr. Monkton, to ask your immediate assistance."

There was another outcry from

those still seated at the table.

"Monkton! Monkton asking for assistance? Never heard of such a thing."

"Forget it, Rasmus! Sit back down and try this rhubarb pie."

"If it's Monkton," said a soberly dressed man on the right hand side of the table, "then the patient is as good as dead. He's no doctor, he's an executioner. Come on, Colonel Pole, take a glass of claret and sit down with us. We meet too infrequently to relish a disturbance."

Erasmus Darwin waved him to silence. "Steady, Josiah. I know your views of Dr. Monkton." He turned full-face to Pole, to show a countenance where the front teeth had long been lost from the full mouth. The jaw was jowly and in need of a razor. Only the eyes belied the impression of coarseness and past disease. They were grey and patient, with a look of deep sagacity and profound power of observation.

"Forgive our jests," he said. "This is an old issue here. Dr. Monkton has not been one to ask my advice on disease, no matter what the circumstance. What does he want now?"

The outcry came again. "He's a pompous old windbag."

"Killer Monkton — don't let him lay a finger on you."

"I wouldn't let him touch you, not if you want to live."

Pole had been staring furiously about him while the men at the table mocked Monkton's medical skills. He



ignored the glass held out towards him, and a scar across the left side of his forehead was showing a flush of red.

"I might share your opinion of Dr. Monkton," he said curtly. "However, I would extend those views to all doctors. They kill far more than they cure. As for you gentlemen, and Dr. Darwin here, if you all prefer your eating and drinking to the saving of life, I cannot change those priorities."

He turned to glare at Darwin. "My message is simple. I will give it and leave. Dr. Monkton asks me to say three things: that he has a man at Bailey's Farm who is critically ill; that already the *facies* of death are showing; and that he would like you" — he leaned forward to make it a matter between him and Darwin alone — "to come and see that patient. If you will not do it, I will go back and inform Dr. Monkton of it."

"No." Darwin sighed. "Colonel Pole, our rudeness to you was unforgivable, but there was a reason for it. These meetings of the Society are the high point of our month, and animal spirits sometimes drive us to exceed the proprieties. Give me a moment to call for my greatcoat, and we will be on our way. My friends have told you their opinions of Dr. Monkton, and I must confess I am eager to see his patient. In my years of practice between here and Litchfield, Dr. Monkton and I have crossed paths many times — but never has he sought my advice on a

medical matter. We are of very different schools, for both diagnosis and treatment."

He turned back to the group, silent now that their high spirits were damped. "Gentlemen, I am sorry to miss both the discussion and the companionship, but work calls." He moved to Pole's side. "Let us go. The last of the light is gone but the moon should be up. We will manage well without a lantern. If Death will not wait, then nor must we."

The road that led to Bailey's Farm was flanked by twin lines of hedgerow. It had been an early spring, and the moonlit white of flowering hawthorn set parallel lines to mark the road ahead. The two men walked side by side, Darwin glancing across from time to time at the other's gloomy profile.

"You appear to have no great regard for the medical profession," he said at last. "Though you bear marks of illness yourself."

Jacob Pole shrugged his shoulders and did not speak.

"But yet you are a friend of Dr. Monkton?" continued Darwin.

Pole turned a frowning face towards him. "I most certainly am not. As I told you, I am no more than a messenger for him, one who happened to be at the farm." He hesitated. "If you press the point — as you seem determined to do — I will admit that I am no friend to any doctor. Men put more

blind faith in witless surgeons than they do in the Lord Himself."

"And with more reason," said Darwin softly.

Pole did not seem to hear. "Blind faith," he went on. "And against all logic. When you pay a man money to cut off your arm, it's no surprise that he tells you an arm must come off to save your life. In twenty years of service to the country, I am appalled when I think how many limbs have come off for no reason more than a doctor's whim."

"And on that score, Colonel Pole," said Darwin tartly, "your twenty years of service must also have told you that it would take a thousand of the worst doctors to match the limb-lopping effects of even the least energetic of generals. Look to the ills of your own profession."

There was an angry silence, and both men paced faster along the moonlit road.

The farm stood well back, a hundred yards from the main highway to Litchfield. The path to it was a gloomy avenue of tall elms, and by the time they were halfway along it, they could see a tall figure standing in the doorway and peering out towards them. As they came closer, he leaned back inside to pick up a lantern and strode to meet them.

"Dr. Darwin, I fear you are none too soon." The speaker's voice was full and resonant, like that of a singer or a practiced clergyman, but there was no

warmth or welcome in it.

Darwin nodded. "Colonel Pole tells me that the situation looks grave. I have my medical chest with me back at Matthew Boulton's house. If there are drugs or dressings needed, Dr. Monkton, they can be brought here in a few minutes."

"I think it may already be too late for that." They had reached the door, and Monkton paused there. He was broad-shouldered, with a long neck and a red, bony face. His expression was dignified and severe. "By the time Colonel Pole left here, the man was already sunk to unconsciousness. Earlier this evening there was delirium, and utterances that were peculiar indeed. I have no great hopes for him."

"He is one of Bailey's farm workers?"

"He is not. He is a stranger, taken ill on the road near here. The woman with him came for help to the farm. Fortunately I was already here, attending to Father Bailey's rheumatics." He shrugged. "That is a hopeless case, of course, in a man of his age."

"Mm. Perhaps." Darwin sounded unconvinced, but he did not press it. "But it was curiously opportune that you were here. So tell me, Dr. Monkton, just what is this stranger's condition?"

"Desperate. You will see it for yourself," he went on at Darwin's audible grunt of dissatisfaction. "He lies on a cot at the back of the scullery."

"Alone? Surely not?"

"No. His companion is with him. I explained to her that his condition is grave, and she seemed to comprehend well enough for one of her station." He set the lantern on a side table in the entrance and took a great pinch of snuff from a decorated ivory box. "Neither one of them showed much sign of learning. They are poor workers from the North, on their way to London to seek employment. She seemed more afraid of me than worried about her man's condition."

"So I ask again, what is that condition?" Darwin's voice showed his exasperation. "It would be better for you to give me your assessment out of their hearing — though I gather that he is hearing little enough."

"He hears nothing, not if lightning were to strike this house. His condition, in summary: the eyes deep-set in the head, closed, the whites only showing in the ball; the countenance, dull and grey; skin, rough and dry to the touch; before he became delirious he complained that he was feeling bilious."

"There was vomiting?"

"No, but he spoke of the feeling. And of pain in the chest. His muscle tone was poor and I detected weakened irritability."

Darwin grunted sceptically, causing Monkton to look at him in a condescending way.

"Perhaps you are unfamiliar with von Haller's work on this, Dr. Darwin? I personally find it to be most

convincing. At any rate, soon after I came to him, the delirium began."

"And what of his pulse?" Darwin's face showed his concentration. "And was there fever?"

Monkton hesitated for a moment, as though unsure what to answer.

"There was no fever," he said at last. "And I do not think that the pulse was elevated in rate."

"Huh." Darwin pursed his full lips. "No fever, no rapid pulse — and yet delirium." He turned to the other man. "Colonel Pole, did you also see this?"

"I did indeed." Pole nodded vigorously. "Look here, I know it may be the custom of the medical profession to talk about symptoms until the patient is past saving — but don't you think you should see the man for yourself, while he's alive?"

"I do." Darwin smiled, unperturbed by the other's gruff manner. "But first I wanted all the facts I can get. Facts are important, Colonel, the fulcrum of diagnosis. Would you prefer me to rush in and operate, another arm or leg gone? Or discuss the man's impending death in the presence of his wife or daughter? That is not a physician's role, the addition of new misery beyond disease itself. But lead the way, Dr. Monkton, I am ready now to see your patient."

Jacob Pole frowned as he followed the other two men back through the interior of the old farmhouse. His expression showed mingled irritation and respect. "You sawbones are all the same,"

he muttered. "You have an answer for everything except a man's illness."

The inside of the farmhouse was dimly lit. A single oil lamp stood in the middle of the long and chilly corridor that led to the scullery and kitchen. The floor was uneven stone flags, and the high shelves carried preserved and wrinkled apples, their acid smell pleasant and surprising.

Monkton opened the door to the scullery, stepped inside, and grunted at the darkness there.

"This is a nuisance. I told her to stay here with him, but she has gone off somewhere and allowed the lamp to go out. Colonel Pole, would you bring the lantern from the corridor?"

While Pole went back for it, Darwin stood motionless in the doorway, sniffing the air in the dark room. When there was light Monkton looked around and gave a cry of astonishment.

"Why, he's not here. He was lying on that cot in the corner."

"Maybe he died, and they moved him?" suggested Pole.

"No, they wouldn't do that," said Monkton, but for the first time his voice was uncertain. "Surely they would not move him without my permission?"

"Looks as though they did, though," said Pole. "We can settle that easily enough."

He threw back his head. "Willy, where are you?" The shout echoed through the whole house. After a few

seconds there was an answering cry from upstairs.

"What's wrong, Jacob? Do you need help there?"

"No. Has anybody been down here from upstairs, Willy? While I was gone, I mean."

"No. I didn't want to risk the sickness."

"That sounds right," grunted Pole. "That's brave old Willy, hiding upstairs with his pipe and flagon."

"Has anyone downstairs been using tobacco?" asked Darwin quietly.

"What?" Pole stared at him. "Tobacco?"

"Use your nose, man. Sniff the air in here." Darwin was prowling forward. "There's been a pipe alight here in the past quarter of an hour. Do you smell it now? I somehow doubt that it was the man's wife that was smoking it."

He walked forward to the cot itself and laid a plump hand flat upon it. "Quite cold. So here we are, but we find no dead man, and no dying man. Dr. Monkton, in your opinion how long did the stranger have to live?"

"Not long." Monkton cleared his throat uncomfortably. "Not more than an hour or two, I would judge."

"Within an hour of final sacrament, and then gone," grunted Darwin. He shook his head and sat on the edge of the cot. "So now what? I don't think we'll find him easily, and we've all three sacrificed an evening to this already. If you are willing to waste a few

more minutes, I'd much like to hear what the patient said when he became delirious. What do you say, gentlemen? May we discuss it?"

Pole and Monkton looked at each other.

"If you wish, although I am very doubtful that it —" began the physician, his rich voice raised a good half-octave.

"All right," interrupted Pole. "Let's do it. But I don't propose to debate this here, in the scullery. Let's go upstairs. I'm sure Will Bailey can find us a comfortable place, and a glass as well if you want it — perhaps he can even find you an acceptable substitute for that rhubarb pie." He turned to the other physician. "As you know, Dr. Monkton, when you were tending to the man, I did little more than watch. With your leave, maybe I should say what I saw, and you can correct me as you see fit. Agreed?"

"Well, now, I don't know. I'm not at all sure that I am willing to —"

"Splendid." Jacob Pole picked up the lamp and started back along the corridor, leaving the others the choice of following or being left behind in darkness.

"Colonel Pole!" Monkton lost his dignity and scuttled after him, leaving Darwin, smiling to himself, to bring up the rear. "Slower there, Colonel. D'you want to see a broken leg in the dark here?"

"No. With two doctors to attend it, a broken leg would more than likely

prove fatal." But Pole slowed his steps and turned so that the lamp threw its beam back along the corridor. "What an evening. Will Bailey and I had just nicely settled in for a pipe of Virginia and a talk about old times — we were together at Pondicherry, and at the capture of Manila — when word came up from downstairs that Dr. Monkton needed another pair of hands to help."

"Why not Will Bailey?" asked Darwin from behind him. "It is his house."

"Aye, but Willy had shipped a pint or two of porter, and I've been running dry for the past five years. I left him there to nod, and I came down." Pole sniffed. "I'm no physician — you may have guessed that already — but when I saw our man back there in the scullery, I could tell he was halfway to the hereafter. He was mumbling to himself, mumbling and muttering. It took me a few minutes to get the hang of his accent — Scots, and thick enough to cut. And he was all the time shivering and shaking, and muttering, muttering...."

The woman had been standing by the side of the cot, holding the man's right hand in both of hers. As the hoarse voice grew louder and more distinct, she leaned towards him.

"John, no. Don't talk that way." Her voice was frightened, and for a brief moment the man's eyes seemed to flicker in their sunk pits, as though about to open. She looked nervously at Jacob Pole and at Dr. Monkton,

who was preparing a poultice of kaolin and pressed herbs.

"His mind's not there. He — he doesna' know whut he's sayin'. Hush, Johnnie, an' lie quiet."

"Inland from Handa Island, there by the Minch," said the man suddenly, as though answering some unspoken question. "Aye, inside the loch. That's where ye'll find it."

"Sh. Johnnie, now quiet ye." She squeezed his hand gently, an attractive dark-haired woman bowed down with worry and work. "Try and sleep, John, ye need rest."

The unshaven jaw was moving again, its dark bristles emphasizing the pale lips and waxen cheeks. Again the eyelids fluttered.

"Two hundred years," he said in a creaking voice. "Two hundred years it lay there, an' niver a mon suspected whut was in it. One o' auld King Philip's ships, an' crammed. Aye, an' not one to ken it 'til a month back, wi' all the guid gold."

Jacob Pole started forward, his thin face startled. The woman saw him move and shook her head.

"Sir, pay him no mind. He's not wi' us, he's ramblin' in the head."

"Move back, then, and give me room," said Monkton. His manner was brisk. "And if you, sir" — he nodded at Pole — "will hold his shoulders while I apply this to his chest. And you, my good woman, go off to the kitchen and bring more hot water. Perhaps this will give him ease."

"I canna' leave him now." The woman's voice was anguished. "There's no sayin' whut he'll come out with. He might —" Her voice trailed off under the doctor's glare, and she picked up the big brass bowl and reluctantly crept out. Jacob Pole took the man firmly by the shoulders, leaning forward to assure his grip.

"Inland from Handa Island," said the man after a few seconds. His breath caught and rattled in his throat, but there seemed to be a tone of a confidence shared. "Aye, ye have it to rights, a wee bit north of Malkirk, at the entrance there of Loch Malkirk. A rare find. But we'll need equipment to take it, 'tis twenty feet down, an' bullion weighs heavy. An' there's the Devil to worrit about. Need help...."

His voice faded and he groaned as the hot poultice was applied to his bare chest. His hands twitched, flew feebly upwards towards his throat, and then flopped back to his sides.

"Hold him," said Monkton. "there's a new fit coming."

"I have him." Pole's voice was quiet and he was leaning close to the man, watching the pallid lips. "Easy, Johnnie."

The dark head was turning to and fro on the folded blanket, grunting with some inner turmoil. The thin hands began to clench and unclench.

"Go south for it." The words were little more than a whisper. "That's it, have to go south. Ye know the position here in the Highlands, but we'll have to

have weapons. Ye canna' fight the Devil wi' just dirks an' muskets, ye need a regular bombard. I've seen it — bigger than leviathan, taller than Foinaven, an' strong as Fingal. Five men killed, an' three more crippled, an' nothin' to show for it."

"It's coming," said Monkton suddenly. "He's stiffening in the limbs."

The breath was coming harder in the taut throat. "Go get the weapons ... wi'out that we'll lose more o' the clansmen. Weapons, put by Loch Malkirk, an' raise the bullion ... canna' fight the Devil ... wi' just dirks. Aye, I'll do it ... south, then. Need weapons ... bigger than leviathan...."

As the voice faded, his thin hands moved up to clasp Pole's restraining hands, and Pole winced as black fingernails dug deep into his wrists.

"Hold tight," said Monkton. "It's the final spasm."

But even as he spoke, the stranger's muscles began to lose their tension. The thin hands slid down to the chest, and the harsh breathing eased. Jacob Pole stood looking down at the still face.

"Has he — gone?"

"No." Monkton looked puzzled. "He still breathes, and it somehow seems to have eased. I — I thought ... Well, he's quiet now. Would you go and find the woman, and see where that hot water has got to? I would also like to cup him."

Pole was peering at the man's face. "He seems a lot better. He's not shak-

ing the way he was. What will you do next?"

"Well, the cupping, he certainly needs to be bled." Monkton coughed. "Then I think another plaster, of mustard, Burgundy pitch, and pigeon dung. And perhaps an enema of anti-mony and rock salt, and possibly scared bitters."

"Sweet Christ." Pole shook his head and wiped his nose on his sleeve. "Not for me. I'd rather be costive for a week. I'll go fetch his woman."

And that was it? Darwin was seated comfortably in front of the empty fireplace, a dish of dried plums and figs on his lap. Jacob Pole stood by the window, looking moodily out into the night and glancing occasionally at Will Bailey. The farmer was slumped back in an armchair, snoring and snorting and now and then jerking back for a few moments of consciousness.

"That's as I recall it — and I listened hard." Pole shrugged. "I don't know what happened after I left the room, of course, but Dr. Monkton says the man was peaceful and unconscious until he too left. The woman stayed."

Darwin picked up a fig and frowned at it. "I have no desire to further lower your opinion of my profession, but now that he is gone I must say that Dr. Monkton's powers of observation are not impressive to me. You looked at that man's face, you say. And as a soldier you have seen men die?"

"Aye. And women and children, sad to say." Pole looked at him morosely. "What's that to do with it?"

Darwin sighed. "Nothing, it seems — according to you and my colleague, Dr. Monkton. Think, sir, think of that room you were in. Think of the *smell* of it."

"The tobacco? You already remarked on that, and I recall no other."

"Exactly. So ask yourself of the smell that was *not* there. A man lies dying, eh? He displays the classic Hippocratic facies of death, as Dr. Monkton described it — displays them so exactly that it is as though they were copied from a text. So. But where was the smell of mortal disease? You know that smell?"

Pole turned suddenly. "There was none. Damme, I knew there was something odd about that room. I know that smell all too well — sweet, like the charnel house. Now why the blazes didn't Dr. Monkton remark it? He must encounter it all the time."

Darwin shrugged his heavy shoulders and chewed on another wrinkled plum. "Dr. Monkton has gone beyond the point in his profession where his reputation calls for exact observation. It comes to all of us at last. Man, proud man, drest in a little brief authority, most ignorant of what he's most assured. Aye, there's some of that in all of us, you and me, too. But let us go, if you will, a little farther. The man gripped your wrists and you held his shoulders. There was delirium, you have

told me that, in his voice. But what was the *feel* of him?"

Pole paced back and forth along the room, his skinny frame stooped in concentration. He finally stopped and glared at Will Bailey. "Pity you've no potion to stop him snoring. I can't hear myself think. A man can't fix his mind around anything with that noise. Let's see now, what was the feel of him."

He held his hands out before him. "I held him so, and he gripped at my wrists *thus*. Dirty hands, with long black nails."

"And their warmth? Carry your mind back to them."

"No, not hot. He wasn't fevered, not at all. But not cold, either. But..." Pole paused and bit his lip. "Something else. The Dutch have my guts, his hands were soft. Black and dirty, but not rough, the way you'd expect for a farmer or a tinker. His hands didn't match his clothes at all."

"I conjectured it so." Darwin spat a plum stone into the empty fireplace. "Will you allow me to carry one step further?"

"More yet? Damme, to my mind we've enough mystery already. What now?"

"You have seen the world in your army service. You have been aboard a fighting ship and know its usual cargo. Did anything strike you as strange about our dying friend's story?"

"The ship, one of King Philip's galleons, sunk off the coast of Scotland two hundred years ago." Pole licked at



his chapped lips, and a new light filled his eyes. "With a load of bullion on board it."

"Exactly. A wreck in Loch Malkirk, we deduce, and bearing gold. Now, Colonel Pole, have you ever been involved in a search for treasure?"

Before Pole could answer there was a noise like a hissing wood fire from the other armchair. It was Will Bailey, awake again and shaking with laughter.

"Ever been involved in a hunt for treasure, Jacob! There's a good one for me to tell yer wife." He went into another fit of merriment. "Should I tell the doctor, Jacob?"

He turned to Darwin. "There was never a man born under the sun who followed treasure harder. He had me at it, too — diving for pearls off Sarawak, and trawling for old silver off the Bermudas' reefs." He lay back, croaking with laughter. "Tell 'im, Jacob, you tell 'im all about it."

Pole peered at him in the dim light. "Will Bailey, you're a shapeless mass of pox-ridden pig's muck," he said mildly. "Tell him about yourself, instead of talking about me. Who ate the poultice off the black dog's back, eh? Who married the chimney sweep, and who hanged the monkey?"

"So you have found treasure before?" interjected Darwin, and Pole turned his attention back to the doctor.

"Not a shilling's worth, though I've sought it hard enough, along with fat

Will there. I've searched, aye, and I've even hunted bullion out on the Main, in sunk Spanish galleons; but I've never found enough to pay an hour's rent on a Turkish privy. What of it, then?"

"Consider our wrecked galleon, resting for two hundred years off the coast of Scotland. How would it have got there? Spanish galleons were not in the habit of sailing the Scottish coast — still less at a time when England and Spain were at war."

"The Armada!" said Bailey. "He's saying yon ship must have been part of the Spanish Armada, come to invade England."

"The Armada indeed. Defeated by Drake and the English fleet, afraid to face a straight journey home to Cadiz through the English Channel, eh? Driven to try for a run the long way, around the north coast of Scotland, with a creep down past Ireland. Many of the galleons tried that."

Pole nodded. "It fits. But —"

"Aye, speak your but." Darwin's eyes were alight with pleasure. "What is your but?"

"But a ship of the Armada had no reason to carry bullion. If anything, she'd have been stripped of valuables in case she went down in battle."

"Exactly!" Darwin slapped his fat thigh. "Yet against all logic we find sunk bullion in Loch Malkirk. One more factor, then I'll await your comment: you and I both live fifteen miles from here, and I at least am an infre-

quent visitor; yet I was called on to help Dr. Monkton — who has never before called me in for advice or comment on anything. *Ergo*, someone knew my whereabouts tonight, and someone persuaded Monkton to send for me. *Who? Who* asked you to fetch me from Matthew Boulton's house?"

Pole frowned. "Why, *he* did." He pointed at Will Bailey.

"Nay, but the woman told me you and Monkton asked for that." Bailey looked baffled. "Only she didn't know the way and had to get on back in there with her man. That's when I asked you to do it — I thought you knew all about it."

Darwin was nodding in satisfaction. "Now we have the whole thing. And observe, at every turn we come back to the two strangers — long since disappeared, and I will wager we see no more of them."

"But what the devil's been going on?" said Pole. He scratched at his jaw and wiped his nose again on his sleeve. "A dying man, Spanish bullion, a lev-iathan in Loch Malkirk — how did we get into the middle of all this? I come here for a bite of free dinner and a quiet smoke with Willy, and before I know it I'm running over the countryside as confused as Lazarus' widow."

"What is *really* going on?" Darwin rubbed at his grey wig. "As to that, at the moment I could offer no more than rank conjecture. We lack tangible evidence. But for what it is worth, Colonel, I believe that you were involved

largely accidentally. My instincts tell me that I was the primary target, and someone aimed their shafts at my curiosity or my cupidity."

"The bullion?" Pole's eyes sparkled. "Aye, that's where they tickled me, too. If you go, I'd like a chance to join you. I've done it before, and I know some of the difficulties. Rely on me."

Darwin shook his head. The plate of fruit had been emptied, and there was a dreamy look on his coarse features. "It is not the treasure. That can be yours, Colonel — if it proves to exist. No, sir, there's sweeter bait for me, something I can scent but not yet see. The Devil, and one thing more, must wait for us in Malkirk."

The pile in the courtyard of the stage inn had been growing steadily. An hour before, three leather bags had been delivered, then a square oak chest and a canvas-wrapped package. The coachman sat close to the wall of the inn, warming his boots at a little brazier and shielding his back against the unseasonably cold May wind. He was drinking from a tankard of small beer and looking doubtfully from the swelling heap of luggage to the roof of the coach.

Finally he looked over his shoulder, measured the angle of the sun with an experienced eye, and rose to his feet. As he did so, there was a clatter of horses' hooves.

Two light pony traps came into

view, approaching from opposite directions. They met by the big coach. Two passengers climbed down from them, looked first at the pile of luggage on the ground, then at the laden traps, and finally at each other. The brooding coachman was ignored completely.

The fat man shook his head.

"This is ridiculous, Colonel. When we agreed to share a coach for this enterprise it was with the understanding that I would take my medical chest and equipment with me. They are bulky, but I do not care to travel without them, for even a few miles from home. However, it did not occur to me that you would then choose to bring with you all your household possessions." He waved a brawny arm at the other trap. "We are *visiting* Scotland, not removing ourselves to it permanently."

The tall, scrawny man had moved to his light carriage and was struggling to take down from it a massive wooden box. Despite his best effort he was unable to lift it clear, and after a moment he gave up, grunted, and turned to face the other. He shook his head.

"A few miles from home is one thing, Dr. Darwin. Loch Malkirk is another. We will be far in the Highlands, beyond real civilization. I know that it has been thirty years since the Great Rebellion, but I'm told the land is not quiet. It still seethes with revolt. We will need weapons — if not for the natives, then for the Devil."

Darwin had checked that his medical chest was safely aboard the coach.

Now he came across to grasp one side of the box on the other trap, and between them they lowered it to the ground.

"You are quite mistaken," he said. "The Highlands are unhappy but they are peaceful. Dr. Johnson fared well enough there, only three years ago. You will not need your weapons, though there is no denying that the people there hold loyal to Prince Charles Edward —"

"— the Young Pretender," grunted Pole. "The upstart blackguard who —"

"— who has what many would accept as a *legitimate* claim to the throne of Scotland, if not of England." Darwin was peering curiously into the wooden box, as Pole carefully raised the lid. "His loss in '46 was a disaster, but the clans are loyal in spite of his exile. Colonel Pole" — he had at last caught a glimpse of the inside of the box — "weapons are one thing, but I trust you are not proposing to take *that* with you to Malkirk."

"Certainly am." Jacob Pole crouched by the box and lovingly stroked the shining metal. "You'll never see a prettier cannon than Little Bess. Brass-bound, iron sheath on the bore, and fires a two-inch ball with black powder. Show me a devil or a leviathan in Loch Malkirk, and I'll show you something that's a good deal more docile when he's had one of these up his weasand." He held up a ball, lofting it an inch or two in the palm of his hand. "And if the natives run wild, I'm sure it

will do the same for them."

Darwin reached to open the lid wider. "Musket and shot, too. Where do you imagine that we are traveling, to the Moon? You know the Highlanders are forbidden to carry weapons, and we have little enough room for *rational* appurtenances. The ragmatical collection you propose is too much."

"No more than your medical chests are too much." Pole straightened up. "I'll discard if you will, but not otherwise."

"Impossible. I have already winnowed to a minimum."

"And so have I."

The coachman stood up slowly and carried his empty tankard back into the inn. Once inside he went over to the keg, placed his tankard next to it, and jerked his head back towards the door.

"Listen to that," he said gloomily. "Easy money, I thought it'd be, wi' just the two passengers. Now they're at each other before they've set foot in the coach, and I've contracted to carry them as far as Durham. Here, Alan, pour me another one in there before I go, and make it a big 'un."

**T**he journey north was turning back the calendar, day by day and year by year. Beyond Durham the spring was noticeably less advanced, with the open apple blossom of Nottingham regressing by the time they reached Northumberland to tight pink buds a week

away from bloom. The weather added to the effect with a return to the raw, biting cold of February, chilling fingers and toes through the thickest clothing. At Otterburn they had changed coaches to an open dray that left them exposed to the gusts of a hard northeaster, and beyond Stirling the centuries themselves peeled away from the rugged land. The roads were unmetalled, mere stony scratches along the slopes of the mountains, and the mean houses of turf and rubble were dwarfed by the looming peaks.

At first Darwin had tried to write. He made notes in the thick volume of his *Commonplace Book*, balancing it on his knee. Worsening roads and persistent rain conspired to defeat him, and at last he gave up. He sat facing forward in the body of the dray, unshaven, swaddled in blankets and covered by a sheet of grey canvas with a hole cut in it for his head.

"Wild country, Colonel Pole." He gestured forward as they drove northwest along Loch Shin. "We are a long way from Litchfield. Look at that group."

He nodded ahead at a small band of laborers plodding along the side of the track. Jacob Pole made a snorting noise that could have as well come from the horse. He was smoking a stubby pipe with a bowl like a cupped hand, and a jar of hot coals stood on the seat behind him.

"What of 'em?" he said. His pipe was newly charged with black tobacco

scraped straight from the block, and he blew out a great cloud of blue-grey smoke. "I see nothing worth talking about. They're just dreary peasants."

"Ah, but they are pure *Celt*," said Darwin cheerfully. "Observe the shape of their heads, and the brachycephalic cranium. We'll see more of them as we go further north. It's been the way of it for three thousand years, the losers in the fight for good lands are pushed north and west. Scots and Celts and Picts, driven and crowded to the northern hills."

Jacob Pole peered at the group suspiciously as he tamped his pipe. "They may look like losers to you, but they look like tough fodder to me. Big and fierce. As for your idea that they don't carry weapons, take a look at those scythes and sickles, and then define a weapon for me." He patted his pocket under his leather cloak. "Ball and powder is what you need for savages. Mark my words, we'll be glad of these before we're done in Malkirk."

"I am not persuaded. The Rebellion was over thirty years ago."

"Aye, on the surface. But I've never yet heard of treasure being captured easy; there's always blood and trouble comes with it. It draws in violence, as sure as cow dung draws flies."

"I see. So you are suggesting that we should turn back?" Darwin's tone was sly.

"Did I say that?" Pole blew out an indignant cloud of smoke. "Never. We're almost there. If we can find boat

and boatman, I'll be looking for that galleon before today's done, Devil or no Devil. I've never seen one in this world, and I hope I'll not see one in the next. But with your ideas on religion, I'm surprised you believe in devils at all."

"Devils?" Darwin's voice was quiet and reflective. "Certainly I am a believer in them, as much as the Pope himself; but I think he and I might disagree on the shapes they bear in the world. We should get our chance to find out soon enough." He lifted a brawny arm from under the canvas. "That has to be Malkirk, down the hill there. We have made better time from Lairg than I anticipated."

Jacob Pole scowled ahead. "And a miserable-looking place it is, if that's all there is to it. But look close down there — maybe we're not the only visitors to those God-forsaken regions."

Half a mile in front of them two light carriages blocked the path that led through the middle of the village. The ill-clad cluster of people gathered around them turned as Pole drove the dray steadily forward and halted twenty yards from the nearer carriage.

He and Darwin stepped down, stretching joints stiffened by the long journey. As they did so, three men came forward through the crowd. Darwin looked at them in surprise for a moment before nodding a greeting.

"I am Erasmus Darwin, and this is Colonel Jacob Pole. You received my message, I take it? We sent word ahead

that we desire accommodation for a few days here in Malkirk."

He looked intently from one to the other. They formed a curiously ill-matched trio. The tallest of them was lean and dark, even thinner than Jacob Pole, and the possessor of bright, dark eyes that snapped from one scene to the next without ever remaining still. He had long-fingered hands, red cheeks that framed a hooked nose and a big chin, and he was dressed in a red tunic and green breeches covered by a patchwork cloak of blues and greys. His neighbor was of middle height and conventionally dressed — but his skin was coal-black and his prominent cheekbones wore deep patterns of old scars.

The third member stood slightly apart from the others. He was short and strongly built, with massive bare arms. His face was half-hidden behind a massive growth of greying beard, and he seemed to crackle with excess energy. He had nodded vigorously as soon as Darwin asked about the message.

"Aye, aye, we got your message right enough. But I thought it came for these gentlemen." He jerked his head to the others at his side. "There was no word with it, ye see, saying who was comin', only a need for beds for two. But ye say ye're the Darwin as sent the note to me?"

"I am." Darwin looked rueful. "I should have said more with that message. It never occurred to me there

might be two arrivals here in one day. Can you find more room for us?"

The broad man shrugged. "I'll find ye a bed — but it will be one for the both of ye, I'll warn ye of that."

Jacob Pole stole a quick look at Darwin's bulky form.

"A good-sized bed," said the man, catching the glance. "In a middlin' size room. An' clean, too, and that has Malcolm Maclaren's own word on it." He thumped at his thick chest. "An' that's good through the whole Hielands."

While Maclaren was speaking, the tall cloaked man had been sizing up Pole and Darwin, his look darting intensely from one to the other absorbing every detail of their appearance.

"Our arrival has caused problems — not expected, we must solve." His voice was deep, with a clipped, jerky delivery and a strong touch of a foreign accent. "Apologies. Let me introduce — I am Dr. Philip Theophrastus von Hohenheim. At your service. This is my servant, Zumal. Yours to command."

The black man grinned, showing teeth that had been filed to sharp points. Darwin raised his eyebrows and looked quizzically at the tall stranger.

"I must congratulate you. You are looking remarkably well, Dr. Paracelsus von Hohenheim, for one who must soon be approaching his three-hundredth year."

After a moment's startled pause the

tall man laughed, showing even yellow teeth. Jacob Pole and Malcolm Maclaren looked on uncomprehendingly as Hohenheim reached out, took Darwin's hand, and shook it hard.

"Your knowledge is impressive, Dr. Darwin. Few people know my name these days — fewer yet can place my date of birth so accurately. To make precise — I was born 1491, one year before Columbus of Genoa found the Americas." He bowed. "You also know my work?"

As Hohenheim was speaking, Darwin had frowned in sudden puzzlement and stood for a few moments in deep thought. Finally he nodded.

"In my youth, sir, your words impressed me more than any others. If I may quote you: 'I admonish you not to reject the method of experiment, but according as your power permits, to follow it without prejudice. For every experiment is like a weapon which must be used according to its own peculiar power.' Great words, Dr. Hohenheim." He looked at the other man coolly. "Throughout my career as a physician, I have tried to adhere to that precept. Perhaps you recall what you wrote immediately after that advice?"

Instead of replying, Hohenheim lifted his left hand clear of his cloak and waved it rapidly in a circle, the extended fingers pointing towards Jacob Pole. As he completed the circle, he flicked his thumb swiftly across the palm of his hand and casually plucked

a small green flask from the air close to Pole's head. While the villagers behind him gasped, he rolled the flask into the palm of his hand.

"Here." He held it out to Jacob Pole. "Your eyes tell it — fluxes and fevers. Drink this. Condition will be improved, much improved. I guarantee. Also — more liquids, less strong drink. Better for you." He turned to Darwin. "And you, Doctor. Medicine has come a long way — great advances since I had to flee *charlatans* of Basel. Let me offer you advice, also. Barley water, liquorice, sweet almond, in the morning. White wine and anise — not too much — at night. To fortify mind and body."

Darwin nodded. He looked subdued. "I thank you for your thoughtful words. Perhaps I will seek to follow them. The ingredients, with the exception of wine, are already in my medical chest."

"Solution." Hohenheim snapped the fingers of his left hand in the air again, and again he held a flask. "White wine. To serve until other supply is at hand."

The villagers murmured in awe, and Hohenheim smiled. "Until tomorrow. I have other business now. Must be in Iverness tonight, meeting there was promised."

"Ye'll never do it, man," burst out Malcolm Maclaren. "Why, it's a full day's ride or more, south of here."

"I have methods." There was another quick smile, a bow towards Pole

and Darwin, then Hohenheim had turned and was walking briskly away towards the west, where the sea showed less than a mile away. While Malcolm Maclaren and the villagers gazed after him in fascinated silence, Jacob Pole suddenly became aware of the flask that he was holding. He looked at it doubtfully.

"With your permission." Darwin reached out to take it. He removed the stopper, sniffed at it, and then placed it cautiously against his tongue.

"Here." Pole grabbed the flask back. "That's mine. You drink your own. Wasn't that amazing? I've seen a lot of doctors, but I've never seen one to match his speed for diagnosis — it's enough to make me change my mind about all pox-peddling physicians. Made you think, didn't it?"

"It did," said Darwin ironically. "It made me think most hard."

"And the way he drew drugs from thin air, did you see that? The man's a marvel. What were you saying about him being three hundred years old? That sounds impossible."

"For once we seem to be in agreement." Darwin looked at the flask he was holding. "As for his ability to conjure a prescription for me from the air itself, that surprises me less than you might think. It is a poor doctor who lacks access to all the ingredients for his own potions."

"But you were impressed." Pole was looking pleased with himself. "Admit it, Doctor, you were impressed."

"I was — but not because of his drugs. That called for some powers of manipulation and manual dexterity, no more. But one of Hohenheim's acts impressed me mightily — and it was one performed without emphasis, as though it was so easy as to be undeserving of comment."

Pole rubbed at his nose and took a tentative sip from his open flask. He pulled a sour face. "Pfaugh. Essence of badger turd. But all his acts seemed beyond me. What are you referring to?"

"One power of the original Paracelsus, Theophrastus von Hohenheim, was to know all about a man on first meeting. I would normally discount that idea as mere historical gossip. But recall, if you will, Hohenheim's first mode of address to me. He called me *Doctor Darwin*."

"That's who you are."

"Aye. Except that I introduced myself here simply as *Erasmus Darwin*. My message to Maclaren was signed only as Darwin. So how did Hohenheim know to call me doctor?"

"From the man who carried your message here?"

"He knew me only as Mister Darwin."

"Maybe Hohenheim saw your medical chest."

"It is quite covered by the canvas — invisible to all."

"All right." Pole shrugged. "Damme, he must have heard of you before. You're a well-known doctor."

"Perhaps." Darwin's tone was



grudging. "I like to believe that I have a growing reputation, and it calls for effort for any man to be sceptical of his own fame. Even so...."

He turned to Malcolm Maclaren, who was still watching Hohenheim and Zumal as they walked towards the sea. Darwin tugged gently at his leather jacket.

"Mr. Maclaren. Did you talk of my message to Dr. Hohenheim before we arrived?"

"Eh? Your message?" Maclaren rubbed a thick-nailed hand across his brow. "I was just startin' to mention something on it when the pair of ye arrived here. But did ye ever see a doctor like that. Did ye ever?"

Darwin tugged again at his jacket. "Did Hohenheim seem to be familiar with my name?"

"He did not." Maclaren turned to stare at Darwin and shook his jacket free. "He said he'd never before heard of ye."

"Indeed." Darwin stepped back and placed his ample rear on the step of the dray. He gazed for several minutes towards the dark mass of Foinaven in the northeast, and he did not move until Pole came bustling up to him.

"Unless you're of a mind to sit there all day in the rain, let's go along with Mr. Maclaren and see where we'll be housed. D'ye hear me?"

Darwin looked at him vacantly, his eyes innocent and almost childlike.

"Come on, wake up." Pole pointed

at the blank-walled cottages, rough stone walls stuffed with sods of turf. "I hope it will be something better than this. Let's take a look at the bed, and hope we won't be sleeping sailor-style, two shifts in one bunk. And I'll wager my share of the bullion to a gnat's snuffbox that there's bugs in the bed, no matter what Malcolm Maclaren says. Well, no matter. I'll take those over Kuzestan scorpions if it comes to a nip or two on the bum. Let's away."

West of Malkirk the fall of the land to the sea was steep. The village had grown on a broad lip, the only level place between mountains and the rocky shore. Its stone houses ran in a ragged line north-south, straddling the rutted and broken road. Jacob Pole allowed the old horse to pick its own path as the dray followed Malcolm Maclaren. He was looking off to the left, to a line of breakers that marked the shore.

"A fierce prospect," remarked Darwin. He had followed the direction of Pole's looks. "And no shore for a shipwreck. See the second line of breakers out there, and the rocks of the reef. It is hard to imagine a ship holding together for one month after a wreck here, still less for two centuries."

"My thought exactly," said Pole gruffly. "Mr. Maclaren?"

"Aye, sir?" The stocky Highlander halted and turned at Pole's call, his frizzy mop of hair wild under the old bonnet.

"Is the whole coastline like this — I mean, rocky and reef-bound?"

"It is, sir, exceptin' only Loch Malkirk, a mile on from here. Ye can put a boat in there easy enough, if ye've a mind to do it. An' there's another wee bit landing south of here that some of the men use." He remained standing, arms across his chest. "Why'd ye be askin'? Will ye be wantin' a boat, same as Dr. Hohenheim?"

"Hohenheim wants a boat?" began Pole, but Darwin silenced him with a look and a hand laid on his arm.

"Not now," he said, as soon as Maclaren had turned to walk again along the path. "You already said it, the lure of gold will attract trouble. We could have guessed it. We are not the only ones who have heard word of a galleon."

"Aye. But *Hohenheim*..." Jacob Pole sank into an unquiet silence.

They were approaching the north end of the village, where three larger houses stood facing each other across a level sward. Maclaren waved his hand at the one nearest the shore, where a grey-haired woman stood at the door.

"I wish ye could have had a place in that, but Dr. Hohenheim has one room, and his servant, that heathen blackamoor, has the other. But we can gi' ye a room that's near as good in here." He turned to the middle and biggest house, and the woman started over to join them.

"Jeanie. Two gentlemen needs a room." He went into a quick gabble of

Gaelic, then looked apologetically at Pole and Darwin. "I'm sorry, but she hasna' the English. I've told her the place has to be clean for ye, an' that ye'll be here for a few days at least. Anythin' else ye'll need while ye are here in Malkirk? Best if I tell her now."

"I think not," said Darwin. But he swung lightly to the ground from the seat of the dray and began to walk quickly across to the black-shuttered third house. He had seen the repeated looks that Malcolm Maclaren and the woman had cast in that direction.

"I don't suppose there is any chance of rooms in here?" he said, not slowing his pace at all. "It will be some inconvenience, sharing a room, and if there were a place in this house, even for one of us —"

"No, sir!" Maclaren's voice was high and urgent. "Not in that house, sir. There's no room there."

He came after Darwin, who had reached the half-open door and was peering inside.

"Ye see, there's no place for ye." Maclaren had moved around and blocked the entrance with a thick arm. "I mean, there's no furniture there, no way that ye could stay there, you or the colonel."

Darwin was looking carefully around the large stone-floored room, with its massive single bed and empty fireplace. He frowned.

"That is a pity. It has no furnishings, true enough, but the bed is of ample size. Could you perhaps bring some

other furniture over from another house, and make it —"

"No, sir." Maclaren pushed the door to firmly and began to shepherd Darwin back towards the other house. "Ye see, sir, that's my brother's house. He's been away inland these past two month, an' the house needs a cleanin' before he comes back. We expect him in a day or two — but ye see, that house isna' mine to offer ye. Come on this way, an' we'll make you comfortable, I swear it."

He went across to the dray, ripped away the canvas with a jerk, grunted, and lifted the box containing Little Bess clear with one colossal heave. The other two men watched in amazement as he braced his legs, then staggered off towards the center house with his burden.

Pole raised his eyebrows. "I won't argue the point with *him*. It took two of us to lift that. But what's over there that he's so worried about? Weapons maybe? Did you see guns or claymores?"

"There was a bed in there — nothing else." Darwin's intrigued tone was at odds with his words.

"You are sure?" Pole had caught the inflection in the other man's voice. "Nothing mysterious there?"

"I saw nothing mysterious." Darwin's voice was puzzled. He went over to the dray and took one of his bags down from it. His expression was thoughtful, his heavy head hunched forward on his shoulders. "You see,

Colonel Pole, that is one of the curiosities of the English language. I saw nothing, and it was mysterious. A room two months empty and neglected, and I saw nothing there — no dust, no cobwebs, no mold. Less than I would expect to see in a house that had been cleaned three days ago. The room was *polished*." He rubbed his chin.

"But what does that mean?"

Darwin shrugged. "Aye, that's the question." He looked at the dirty grey smoke rising from the house in front of them. "Well, we will find out in due course. Meanwhile, unless my nose is playing me tricks, there's venison cooking inside. A good dish of collops would sit well after our long journey. Come on, Colonel, I feel we have more than earned an adequate dinner."

He went in, through a door scarcely wide enough to permit passage of his broad frame. Jacob Pole stared after him and scratched his head.

"Now what the devil was all *that* about? Him and his mysterious nothings. That's like a sawbones, to conceal more than they tell. I'll still bet there's weapons in that place, hidden away somewhere. I saw their looks."

He picked up a small case and followed into the house's dark interior, where he could now hear the rattle of plates and cups.

Jacob Pole awoke just before true dawn, at the first cock crow. He climbed out of bed, slipped on his boots, and

picked up the greatcoat that lay on the chest of drawers. Despite his misgivings, the bed had been adequately large and reasonably clean. He looked to the other side of it. Darwin lay on his back, a great mound under the covers. He was snoring softly, his mouth open half an inch. Pole picked up his pipe and tobacco and went through to the other room to sit by the embers of the peat fire.

He had spent a restless night. Ever since dinner his thoughts had been all on the galleon, and he had been unable to get it out of his mind. Hohenheim was after the bullion, that was clear enough. Maclaren had made no secret of the galleon's presence, but it was also clear from the way that he shrugged the subject away with a move of his great shoulders that he knew nothing of anything valuable aboard it. He had seemed amazed that anyone, still less two parties, should be interested in it at all. The Devil, too, had been casually shrugged off.

Yes, surely it was there — had been there as long as anyone in the village could remember.

Its dimensions?

He had pondered for a while at Darwin's question. As large as a whale, some said — others said much larger. It lived near the galleon, but it was peaceful enough. It would merely be a man's fancy to say that the creature *guarded* anything in the loch.

The three men had played a curious game of three-way tag for a couple of

hours. Pole had wanted to talk only of the galleon, while neither Darwin nor Maclaren seemed particularly interested. Darwin had concentrated his attention on the Devil, but again Maclaren had given only brief and uninformative answers to the questions. He had his own interests. He pushed Darwin to talk of English medicine, of new drugs and surgical procedures, of hopeless cases and miracle cures. He wanted to know if Hohenheim could do all the things that he hinted at — make the blind see, save the living, even raise the dead. When Darwin spoke Maclaren leaned forward unblinking, stroking his full beard and scratching in an irritated way at his breeches' legs, as though resenting the absence of the kilt.

Pole shook his head. It had been a long, unsatisfying evening, no doubt about it.

He picked up a glowing lump of peat, applied it to his pipe, and sucked in his first morning mouthful of smoke. He sighed with satisfaction and went at once into a violent and lengthy fit of coughing. Eyes streaming, he finally had to stagger across and take a few gulps from the water jug before he could breathe again and stand there wheezing by the window.

"You missed your true vocation, Colonel," said a voice behind him. "If you were always available to wake the village, the cockerel would soon be out of work."

Darwin stood at the door in his

stockinged feet. He was blinking and scratching his paunch with one hand, while the other held his nightcap on his head.

Pole glared at him and took another swig from the water jug. Then he looked out of the window next to him, stiffened, and snorted.

"Aye, and it's just as well that one of us gets up in the morning. Look across there. A light in that house, and that means Hohenheim is up already — and I'll wager he'll be on his way to Loch Malkirk while we're still scratching around here. He's ahead of us already, and with his powers I wouldn't put anything past him. We have to get moving ourselves, and over to the loch as soon as we can."

"But you heard Hohenheim last night, announcing his intention to be in Inverness. What makes you think that he is still in Malkirk?" Darwin nodded to the grey-haired woman, who had silently appeared to tend the fire and set a black cauldron of water on it. "He is probably not even here."

"He is, though." Pole nodded his head again towards the window. The door of the other house had opened, and two figures were emerging. It was too dark to make out their clothing, but there was no mistaking the tall, thin build, backed by a shorter form that seemed to be a part of the darkness itself.

"Hohenheim, and his blackamoor." Pole's voice held a gloomy satisfaction. "As I feared, and as I told you, we

come to seek bullion, and we find we are obliged to compete with a man who can see the future, travel fast as the wind to any place that he chooses, and conjure powerful nostrums from thin air. That makes me feel most uneasy. By the way, did you take the draught that he provided for you?"

"I did not," said Darwin curtly. He sat down at the table and pulled a deep dish towards him. "I found one bowl of Malcolm Maclaren's lemon punch more than enough strange drink for me last night. My stomach still sits uneasy. Come, Colonel, sit down and curb your impatience. If we are to head for Loch Malkirk, we should not do so until we have food in us. The good woman is already making porridge, and I think there will be more herring and bowls of frothed milk. If we are to embark on rough water, at least let us do so well-bottomed."

Pole sat down bad-temperedly, glared at his offending pipe, and pecked half-heartedly at porridge, oatcake, and smoked fish. He watched while Darwin devoured all those along with goat's whey, a dish of tongue and ham, and a cup of chocolate. But it went rapidly, and in five minutes the plates were clear. Pole rose at once to his feet.

"One moment more," said Darwin. He went across to the woman, who had watched him eating with obvious approval. He pointed at a plate of oatcakes. She nodded, and he gave her an English shilling. As he loaded the cakes into a pocket of his coat, Jacob Pole

nodded grudgingly.

"Aye, you're probably right to hold me there, Doctor. There'll likely be little hospitality for us at the loch."

Darwin raised his eyebrows at the sudden truce, then turned again to the woman. He pointed at the rising sun, then followed its path across the sky with his arm. He halted when he had reached a little past the vertical, and pointed at the cauldron and the haunch of dried beef hanging by the wall. The woman nodded, spoke a harsh-sounding sentence, laughed, and came forward to pat Darwin's ample stomach admiringly.

Darwin coughed. He had caught Pole's gleeful look.

"Come on. At least dinner is assured when we return."

"Aye. And more than that, from the look of it." Pole's voice was dry.

The path to Loch Malkirk was just as Maclaren had described it, running first seaward, then cutting back inland over a steep incline. The ground was still wet and slippery with a heavy dew that hung sparkling points of sunlight over the heather and dwarf juniper. By the time they had traveled fifty yards their boots and lower breeches were soaked. When the loch was visible beyond the brow of the hill, they could see the mist that still hung over the surface of the water.

Darwin paused at the top of the rise and laid his hand on Pole's arm. "One second, Colonel, before we head down. We could not find a better place

than this to take a general view of how the land lies."

"More than that," said Pole softly. "We'll have a chance to see what Hohenheim is doing without him knowing it. See, he's down there, off to the left."

The shape of the loch was like a long wine bottle, with the neck facing to the northwest. An island off-shore stood like a cork, to leave narrow straits through which the tides raced in and out. Once in past the neck of the bottle, the water ran deeper and the shore plunged steeply into the loch. Hohenheim and Zumal stood at the head of the narrows, looking to the water.

Darwin squinted across at the other side, estimating angles and widths. He sucked his lips in over his gums. "What do you think, Colonel?"

"Eh? Think about what?"

"The depth, out in the middle there." Darwin followed Pole's gaze to where Hohenheim and his servant had moved to a small coble and were preparing to launch it. "Aye, it seems they may be answering my question for me soon enough — that's a sounding line they're loading with the paddles. Steep sides and hard rock. It would not surprise me to find that the loch sounds to a thousand feet. There's depth sufficient to cover a galleon ten times over."

"Or hide a devil as big as you choose." Pole wriggled in irritation, and Darwin patted him on the arm.

"Hold your water, Colonel. Our

friends there will not be raising any treasure ship today; they lack equipment. With luck, they will do some of your work for you. Do not overestimate Hohenheim."

"You saw that he has great powers."

"Did I? I am less sure. Observe, he uses a boat, so at least he cannot walk upon the waters."

Their voices had been dropped to whispers, and while they spoke, Zumal had pushed the boat off, Hohenheim sitting in the bow. He was in the same motley clothes, quite at ease and holding the sounding line in his lap. At his command Zumal paddled twenty yards off-shore, then checked their forward motion. Hohenheim stood up, swung his right arm backward and forward a couple of times, and released the line. Darwin muttered to himself and leaned in concentration.

"What's wrong?" Pole had noticed Darwin's move from the corner of his eye.

"Nothing. Only a suspicion that Hohenheim..."

Darwin's voice trailed off as the weighted line unwound endlessly into the calm waters of the loch. Soon Hohenheim had paid out all that he held, still without touching bottom. He spoke to Zumal, gathered in the line, and sat quietly as the coble moved slowly off towards the mouth of the loch. He tried the line again, and as they moved farther, the depth decreased until it was less than twenty feet in the neck at the entrance.

Hohenheim nodded and said something to his companion. They both had all their attention on the line. It was Jacob Pole, looking back along the length of the inlet, who noticed the swirling ripple spreading across its surface. It showed as a line of crosscurrent, superimposing itself on the pattern of wavelets that was now growing in response to the morning sea-breeze. The forward edge of the moving ripple was running steadily towards the coble at the seaward end of the loch. Pole gripped Darwin's arm hard.

"See it there. Along the loch."

The ripple was still moving. Now its bow was less than fifty yards from where Hohenheim was reeling in his line. As the spreading wave came closer, there seemed to be a hint of lighter grey moving beneath the surface. The wave moved closer to the boat, thirty yards, then twenty. Pole's grip had unconsciously tightened on Darwin's arm until his knuckles showed white. At last, where the bed of the loch became sharply shallower, the moving wavefront veered away to the left. Another moment and it was gone. All that remained were spreading ripples, lifting the coble gently as the light craft was caught in their swell.

Hohenheim looked round as he felt the motion of the boat, but there was nothing to be seen. After a moment he turned his attention back to the line.

Pole released his hold on Darwin.

"The Devil," he said softly. "We've seen the Devil."

Darwin's eyes were glittering. "Aye, and it's a Devil indeed. But what in the name of Linnaeus is it? That's a real test for your systems taxonomical. It is not a whale, or it would surface and sound for its breathing. It is not a great eel — not unless all our ideas on size are in preposterous error. And it cannot be fish or flesh in any bestiary I can construct."

"Be damned with the name we give it." The shaking in Pole's hand was more pronounced, from excitement and alarm. "It was big, to make a wave that size — and fast. You scoffed at me when I brought Little Bess, but I was right. We'll need protection when we're on the loch. I'll have to carry it here and set it up to train where we need — forget the muskets, they'll be no better than a peashooter with that monster."

"I am not sure that the cannon will serve any useful purpose. But, meanwhile, we have a duty." Darwin started heavily down the hill towards the loch side.

"Here, what are you up to?" Pole hesitated, then bent to pick up his pipe and spyglass from the heather as Hohenheim and his servant turned to face the sudden sounds from the hillside.

"To give fair warning," called Darwin over his shoulder. Then he was down by the water's edge, waving at the two in the boat and calling them to look behind them.

Hohenheim turned, scanned the loch's calm surface, then spoke quietly

to Zumal. The black man paddled the coble in close to the loch side, running it to within a few feet of Darwin.

"I see no monster," Hohenheim was saying as Jacob Pole hurried up to them. "Nor did Zumal — and we were near, on water. Not spying in secret from shade of heather."

"There is a creature in the loch," said Darwin flatly. "Big, and possibly dangerous. I called to you for your own protection."

"Ah." Hohenheim put his finger to his nose and looked at Darwin with dark, suspicious eyes. "Very kind. You did not want to drive us from loch, eh? If so, you need better story — much better."

He looked at Darwin slyly. "So we are here for same purpose as each other. You would argue with that? I think not."

"If you mean a sunken galleon, for my part I would certainly argue." As he spoke, Darwin continued to scan the surface of the loch, seeking any sign of a new disturbance there. "I came here for quite different reasons."

"But I didn't," said Pole. "Aye, I'll admit it — why not? It drew me here, three hundred miles, that galleon, just as it drew you. How did you hear of it?"

Hohenheim pulled his tattered cloak around him and stretched to his full height. "I have methods, secret methods. Accept that I heard, and do not question."

"All right, if that's what you want,



but I would like to suggest an alliance. What do you say? There's a ship out yonder, and Dr. Darwin spoke the truth, there is something out in the loch that needs to be watched for. The people of Malkirk set no value on the galleon, but we do. What do you say? Work together, we and you, and we'd have the work done in half the time. Equal shares, you and us."

Pole stopped for breath. All his words had rushed out in one burst, while Hohenheim had listened, his black eyebrows arched. Now he laughed aloud and shook his head.

"Never, my good Colonel. Never. If we were equal, then maybe. Maybe I would listen. But we are not equal. I am ahead of you — in everything. In knowledge, skills, tools. Do it, my friend, try and beat me. I have power you lack, eh? Knowledge you lack, eh? Equipment, you ask about? Yesterday I was in Inverness, buying tools for seeing loch. Tonight it comes, tomorrow we use. Here, see for self."

He snapped his fingers a few inches from Jacob Pole's chin. As usual his gesture seemed exaggerated, larger than life, and when he opened his hand he was holding a square of brown paper.

"Here is list. Read, see for self — you will need every item on it. And you will be forced to buy in Inverness, two days away for you. By time you ready to begin, we will be finished and away from here."

Pole's sallow face had flushed at the

tone in Hohenheim's voice. He shook off Darwin's hand and stepped within inches of the tall doctor.

"Hohenheim, last night you impressed me mightily. And you did us both a favor giving us those potions. This morning Dr. Darwin did his best to return that favor, warning you of a danger out on the loch. Instead of thanking him you insult us, saying we made up a monster to keep you away. Well, go ahead, ignore the warning. But don't look for help from me if you get in trouble. And as for the galleon, we'll work without you." He stepped back. "Come on, Dr. Darwin, I see no reason to stay here longer."

He turned and began to stride back up the hillside. Hohenheim looked after him and waved one hand in a contemptuous gesture of dismissal. His laugh followed Pole up the hill, while Darwin stood silent, staring hard at the other's lean face and body. His face was an intent mask of thought and dawning conviction.

"Dr. Hohenheim," he said at last. "You have mocked a well-meant and sincere warning; you have refused Colonel Pole's honest offer of cooperation; and you have dismissed my word when I told you I did not come to Malkirk for the galleon. Very well, that is your option. Let me say only this, then I will leave you to ponder it. The danger in the loch is real, I affirm again — more real than I would have believed an hour ago, more real than the treasure that you are so intent on seeking.

But beyond that, *Doctor Hohenheim*, I think I know what you are and how you came here. Bear that in mind, the next time that you seek to astonish Malcolm Maclaren and his simple villagers with your magic flights to Inverness, or your panaceas drawn from the air."

He snapped his fingers — clumsily, with none of Hohenheim's panache — turned, and began to stump after Jacob Pole up the hilly path that led to Malkirk. Hohenheim's jeering laugh sped his progress as he went.

**H**e's still there, with another crowd around him. Now he's taken a big knitting needle from one of the women. I wonder what he's going to do with it? I could give him a suggestion or two."

Jacob Pole stood upright, turning from the window where he had stooped to look at the open area between the houses.

"Here, Doctor, come over and look at this."

Darwin sighed, closed his *Commonplace Book* in which he was carefully recording observations of the local flora, and stood up.

"And with what new mystery are we now being regaled?" He looked out onto the dusk of a fine evening. On the green in front of them, Hohenheim had taken the knitting needle and waved it twice in a flashing circle. He grasped the blunt end in both hands, directed the bone point at his heart, and pushed

inwards. The needle went into his chest slowly, an inch, then another, until it was buried to more than half its length. He released his hold, and as the villagers around him gasped, a bead of crimson blood oozed out along the white bone and dripped onto his tunic.

Hohenheim let the needle remain for a few seconds, a white spike of bone deep in his chest. Then he slowly withdrew it, holding it cupped in his palms. When it was fully clear, he ran the length between fingers and thumb, spun it in a flashing circle, and handed it to be passed among the villagers. They touched it gingerly. As it went from hand to hand, he took a small round box from his cloak, dug out a nailful of black salve on his index finger, and rubbed it into the round hole in his shirt. He was smiling.

"What is that drug?" Pole had his nose flattened against the dirty glass. "To save him from a wound like that — I've never known anything like it."

"I think I have," said Darwin drily, and went back to his seat. But Jacob Pole was no longer listening. He went to the door and out, to join the group watching Hohenheim. The latter nodded as he appeared.

"Good evening again, Colonel." His voice was friendly, as though the morning incident had never happened. "We'll have no sea monsters, eh? But you come at right time. Now I will show antidote, cure for all poisons. So far, I have used only for crowned heads of Europe. Great secret, of high

value." He glanced towards the house. "A pity that Dr. Darwin is not here, he might learn much — or maybe not."

He reached into the tall cabinet by his side and took out a slim container of oily fluid. The pitch stopper came out easily, and he sniffed at it for a moment.

"Very good. Here is phial, see? Now, pass it round, one to another. Smell it — but not taste it. Deadly poison. If you want, replace with other poison — makes no difference to my antidote. I have made this extract from yew leaves. Colonel, you take it."

Pole sniffed carefully at the bottle. "It's terrible."

"Pass on to next man."

The villager next to Pole handled the bottle delicately, as though it might explode. It went from hand to hand, some sniffing, others content to look; and at last came back to Hohenheim.

"Good. Now watch close." He reached again into the cabinet beside him and took out a neatly made cage of iron spokes around a wooden frame. A grey rat ran from side to side within, nervously rearing up against the narrow bars and sniffing hungrily at the air. Hohenheim held the cage high for a few seconds, so that the villagers could observe the rat closely. He set the cage on the ground, poured a drop or two of liquid from the phial onto a fragment of oat bread, and slipped it deftly between the bars.

The rat paused for a few moments, while the circle of villagers held their

breath. At last the rat sidled forward, sniffed the bread, and devoured it.

He put his left hand to his right wrist and began to count in a clear, deep voice. At thirty, the rat hesitated in its movements around the floor of the cage, and reared up against the bars. Ten more beats, and it slipped to its belly, paws scrabbling against the wood.

Hohenheim did not wait to complete the count. He lifted the phial to his lips and tossed the contents down his throat. As the villagers muttered to themselves, he inverted the bottle, allowing a few last drops of viscous liquid to fall to the grass.

"Now — and quickly — the antidote."

He pulled a flask of green liquid from his cloak, drained it, and carefully replaced the stopper. Amid the excited hubbub of the watching group, talking to each other in Gaelic about what they had witnessed, Hohenheim turned to Malcolm Maclaren. He was quite calm and relaxed, with no trace of nervousness about the poison.

"There is a limited amount of this antidote. If any have desperate need — or want for future use — I can make arrangement. Normally I do not sell, but here where doctors few I will make special case. You tell them, eh? While you do it" — he was looking at the southern road in the gathering dusk, nodding knowingly — "I think I have business to attend. See? I bought yesterday in Inverness, now it comes. If

you will help unload, I can use tomorrow."

He pointed to the laden cart coming towards them, drawn easily down the hill by two dusty horses. "Those are my supplies for work here." He turned to Jacob Pole. "As I told you, we are well advanced in plans. We have located the wreck, we have equipment to look at it. Maybe you and Dr. Darwin stop wasting your time here, would like to make arrangements to go home to south? Galleon will be done before you begin to look, eh? So good night, Colonel, and sleep well."

He nodded to Pole, bowed again to the circle of villagers, and strolled away towards the arriving cart. It was heavily laden with boxes and packages, and most of the villagers followed him, openly inquisitive. Jacob Pole stood, biting at a fingernail and staring angrily after Hohenheim.

"Arrogant pox-hound!" he said to Zumal, who alone still stood by him. The black man ignored him. He was busy. He turned the dead rat out of the cage, replaced everything back in the tall cabinet, and carefully closed it. Placing it on a low trolley, he pushed it to the house and went inside. While Pole still stood there undecided, Malcolm Maclaren came back along the path towards him. The stocky Scotsman was looking worried, biting his lip and frowning.

"Colonel, I'm not wantin' to trouble ye now, but is Dr. Darwin inside an' available for a word?"

"He is inside." Pole still sounded angry. "But if you can keep him to one word, you're a better man than I am."

He led the way to the house. Darwin was sitting in the same chair, still at work on his notes. A bottle of Athole brose stood untouched by his side, and he had been forced to light the oil lamp, but otherwise everything was exactly as Pole had left it. Darwin looked up and nodded calmly to Maclaren.

"Another display of medical thau-maturgy, I have no doubt. What was the latest wonder? *Ex Hohenheim semper aliquid novi*, if you will permit me to paraphrase Pliny." His tone was cheerful as he laid down his pen and closed the book. "Well, Malcolm Maclaren, what can I do for you?"

The Scot fidgeted uneasily for a few seconds, his dark face working under the full growth of beard.

"I did not come to talk to ye of Hohenheim," he said at last. "No, nor of yon galleon that ye seek to raise. I'm askin' help. Ye may recall I spoke to ye about my brother, away inland these past two month. We had word come in today, rare bad news. He took an accident, out on the mountains. A fall."

Darwin puffed out his cheeks but did not speak. Malcolm Maclaren rubbed his big hands together, struggling for the right words.

"A bad fall," he said finally. "An' we hear of injury to his head. They're bringin' him on back here, an' I'm expectin' him tomorrow, before nightfall."

I was thinkin...." He paused, then the words came in one rush. "I was wonderin' if ye might be willin' to do some kind of examination of him and see if there's any treatment that would help him to regain his health and strength — we have plenty money, that's no problem, an' we'll pay your usual fee an' more, if I have to."

"Aha," said Darwin, so softly that Jacob Pole had trouble catching his words. "At last I think we see it." He stood up. "Fee is not an issue, Malcolm Maclaren. I will examine him gladly and give you my best opinion as to his condition. But I wonder a little that you are not consulting Dr. Hohenheim. He is the one who has been displaying prodigies of medical skill to the people of your village. Whereas I have done nothing here to show power as a physician."

Maclaren gloomily shook his grizzled head. "Don't say that. I've had argument enough this very day on that subject, from man and woman both. I saw what he can do. Yet there's somethin' I canna' put a name to, that makes me...."

His voice trailed off and he and Darwin stood eye to eye for a long moment, until Darwin nodded.

"You're an observing man, Malcolm Maclaren, and a shrewd one. Those are rare qualities. If your evaluation of Dr. Hohenheim is not one that you can readily place on logical foundations, that is not necessarily sufficient reason to mistrust it. Like the ani-

mals, humans communicate on many levels more basic than words."

He turned to Jacob Pole. "You heard the request, and I am sure you see the problem it creates for me. I promised to help you with your equipment. But if I am also to be here, awaiting the arrival of Maclaren's brother, I will be unable to do it. I know you will not wish to wait another day —"

"And there's no reason for that," said Maclaren gruffly. "If it's another pair of hands ye need, I've twenty men ready to serve — even if I have to break heads to persuade them of it. When do ye need that help?"

"Tomorrow afternoon will do well enough." Jacob Pole sensed that Maclaren was in his most cooperative mood. "I'll want help to carry something to the loch. On that score, you know all about the Devil there. But have you ever seen it yourself, and is it dangerous?"

"Aye, I've seen it, but never close, and never more than a shape in the water. Others here have seen it better. But I've never heard word of harm that came to any man that left the beast to live in its own way." Maclaren sat down, lifting his head to look at the others. "We've had trouble in these parts, plenty of it, but it was not from the beast in the loch. Men have lost their lives, these past years in the Highlands — an' their heritances. But it was not the Devil's doin' that left the women lonely an' took all of us down

close to beggary. For that ye have to look closer to your own kind. Aye, but I'm runnin' loose an' sayin' more than I ought to say."

He shook his head, stood up, and abruptly left the room. Pole, following him to the door, could at first see no sign of him in the dusk. Then he made out a squat, dark figure striding rapidly across to the house with the black shutters. For the first time since they arrived, a light was showing in the window there.

It was a problem, and one that he could have anticipated. Jacob Pole crouched by the box that held Little Bess, grumbled to himself, and frowned at the late afternoon sunlight that was turning the peaks to the east into soft purple.

Darwin had been adamant, and Maclaren had agreed with him. The villagers could help carry the box, but they must not see the cannon inside. With weapons forbidden since the Disarming Act, a Highlander risked fines and transportation if he so much as assisted in knowingly carrying arms. The responsibility for handling Little Bess at the loch had to remain with Jacob Pole alone.

Very well; but how in damnation was he supposed to manhandle two hundredweight of cannon so that it pointed correctly to cover the loch? He was no Malcolm Maclaren, barrel chest and bulging muscles.

Grunting and swearing, Pole lifted the one pound balls out of the box and laid them on the canvas next to the bags of black powder. Thank God the weather was fine, so nothing would get wet (but better hurry, and be done before the dew fell). With powder and shot removed, the box and cannon was just light enough to be dragged around to face the right direction. But now the sides of the box made it impossible either to prime or fire. And the cannon was too heavy to lift clear. Pole sighed and took the iron lever that he had used to pry open the top of the container. He began to remove the sides, one by one. It was a slow and tedious job, and by the time that the last pin had been loosed and the wooden frame laid to the ground, dusk was already well on its way.

At that point, he hesitated. He had intended to fire one test round, to make sure that range and angle were correct. But perhaps that should wait for the morning, when the light would be better and the travel of the ball more easily seen. After a few moments of thought, he loaded a bag of black powder and a ball, and placed the fuze all ready. Then he went across to a square of covering canvas, well away from the powder, and took out tobacco, pipe, flint and tinder. He sat down. His pipe was already charged, and the flint in his hand, when he looked down the hill to the surface of Loch Malkirk. He had been too absorbed in his own work to pay any attention there. Now

he realized that two figures were busy by the loch's edge.

Hohenheim and Zumal were wheeling a handcart full of boxes and packages. At the flat-bottomed coble they halted and began to transfer cartons. As the breeze dropped, Hohenheim's words carried clearly up from the quiet water. Pole, crouched there in his brown cloak, was indistinguishable from the rocks and the heather.

He repressed his instinctive reaction, to call a greeting. As they finished loading and moved off-shore, he sat, pipe still unlit, and watched closely.

"Steady now, forward until I give the word." That was Hohenheim, leaning far forward in the boat's bow. With the sun almost on the horizon, the shadow of the boat was like a long, dark spear across the calm surface of the loch. Hohenheim was leaning over into the shadow, so that it was impossible for Jacob Pole to see what he was doing.

"Back-paddle, and slow us — now." The coble was stationary on the calm surface. The man in the bow reached down over the front of the boat, pulled up a loop of line from the water, and tied it to a ring in front of him.

"Looks good. I see no drift at all since yesterday." Hohenheim turned and nodded to Zumal. "Get ready now, and I will prepare the rest."

The black man laid down the paddle and began to strip off his clothes. The setting sun was turning the surface

of the loch into a single glassy glare in Jacob Pole's eyes, and Zumal was no more than a dark silhouette against the dazzling water. Pole raised a hand to shield his eyes and tried to get a closer look at Hohenheim's activities.

The scene suddenly changed. As he watched, the even surface of the loch seemed to tear, to split along a dark central line, and to divide into two bright segments. Pole realized that he was seeing the effects of a moving ripple, a bow wave that tilted the water surface so that the sunlight no longer reflected directly to his eyes. Something big was moving along the loch. He dropped his pipe unheeded to the heather, and his heart began to beat faster.

The coble was close to the seaward end of the loch, where the shallow water lay. The moving wave was still more than a quarter of a mile away in the central deep. But it was moving steadily along towards the boat. Pole watched in fascination as it came within about forty yards, to where the bed of the loch began to rise. Then the wave veered left and turned back along the shore. The two men in the coble were too busy to notice. Hohenheim had now taken a small barrel from the bottom of the boat, removed its top, and was adjusting something inside it. He said a few soft words to Zumal, naked now in the stern, and laughed. Behind them the ripples still spread across the sweep of water.

"Ready?"

Pole heard the single word from Hohenheim as the sun finally dipped below the western horizon and everything took on the deeper tones of true twilight. Zumal's nod was barely visible in the gloom.

"As soon as I lower it, follow it down. It lasts only a short while, so act quickly."

Pole watched the flash of flint and metal that followed the last words. It sparked three times, then there was the glow of tinder. Hohenheim was holding a smoldering wad of cotton over the open end of the barrel.

"Now."

A dazzling white light was shining from the barrel's mouth. Hohenheim lifted it out and dropped it over the side. The flare sank at once to the bottom, but instead of being extinguished by the water it seemed to burn brighter than ever, with a blue-white flame.

The bottom of the loch was suddenly visible as a rugged, shiny floor of rock and sand. Close to the coble, just a few feet from the underwater flare, Jacob Pole could see the outline of a long ship's hulk. As he crouched by his cannon, almost too excited to breathe, he saw the naked form of Zumal slip over the side of the coble, swim to the float, and move hand-over-hand down to the anchor that had marked the wreck.

Shielding his eyes from the direct light, Pole peered at the shape of the hulk. After a few seconds he could make out details through the unfamil-

iar pattern of light and shadow on the bed of the loch. He gasped as he realized what he was seeing.

In the village, the fading light had been the signal for some new activity. Darwin could sense the bustle of movement through the walls of the house, and there was a constant clatter of footsteps in and out of the kitchen.

It was one of the few signs of a rising tension. After Jacob Pole left, Maclaren had dropped in every half hour, trying to appear casual, and spoken a few distracted words to Darwin before hurrying out again. At five o'clock Maclaren had made a final visit and departed with the woman who did the cooking, leaving Darwin to dine as best he might on cold goose, oat bread, chicken fricassee, and bread pudding, and to order his thoughts however he chose.

When Maclaren finally appeared again, he looked like a different person. His lowland garb was gone, and in its place were brogues, knee-length knitted socks, the kilt, and a black waistcoat with gold-thread buttons.

"Aye, I know," he said at Darwin's inquiring look. "'Tis against the law yet to wear Highland dress. But I'll do no less to welcome my brother home, whatever the law says. An' there's talk of a change of the rule in a year or two, so what's the harm? Surely a man ought to be allowed to dress any which way he chooses. But would ye be all ready, then?"



Darwin nodded. He stood, picked up the well-worn medical chest that had been his companion on a thousand night journeys, and followed Maclaren outside into the warm spring night. The Highlander led the way at a stately pace to the stone house with the black shutters. In spite of the darkness, Darwin had the feeling that many eyes followed their progress from the shadows.

At the door Maclaren halted. "Dr. Darwin, I'm not one to want to deceive myself. It's a bad wound, that I know, and I'm a man that respects the truth. I'm not after lookin' for ill news, but will ye gi' me the word, that ye'll tell me honest if it's good news or bad?"

The light was spilling out into the quiet night. Darwin turned to look steadily into the other man's worried eyes.

"Unless there is good reason to do it, to save life or lessen suffering, it is my belief that a full and honest diagnosis is always best. You have my word. No matter where the truth may take us tonight, I will provide it as I see it. And in return I ask that what I say should not create ill-feeling to me and to Colonel Pole."

"Ye have that word, an' it's my life that stands behind it."

Maclaren pushed the door wide open and they went on in.

The room had not changed, but now lamps had been placed in eight or nine places around it. Everything was well-lit and spotlessly clean. There were lamps on each side of the big bed,

where a man lay covered to the chest by a tartan blanket.

Darwin stepped forward. For many seconds he was motionless, scrutinizing the man's chalk-white face and loose posture.

"What is his age?"

"Fifty-five." Maclaren's voice was a whisper.

Darwin stepped forward and turned the blanket back to the thighs. When he rolled back an eyelid under his thumb, the man did not move. He opened the mouth, studying the decaying teeth, and grunted to himself thoughtfully.

"Here. Help me turn him to his side." Darwin's voice was neutral, giving no clue as to his thoughts. With Maclaren's help they moved the man to his right side, revealing the red cicatrice that ran all the way from the crown of his head down to above the left temple. Darwin bent close and moved his hand gently along it, feeling the shape of the bone beneath the scar. The wound was indented, a deep cleft in the skull, and no hair grew above it.

Darwin sucked in a deep breath. "Aye, a sore wound indeed. One cleavage, straight from the sphenoid wing to the top of the calvaria. It is a wonder to see any man living after such an injury."

He pulled the blanket back farther, to show the legs and feet covered in a white and gold robe. Then he was a long while silent, scowling down at the patient. He sniffed the man's breath,

examined nose and ears, and finally lifted the arms and legs to palpate the joints and muscles. The palms of the hands and the short, well-trimmed nails came in for their own brief examination, and he felt the condition of the sinews in wrists and ankles.

"Lift him to a sitting position," he said at last. "And let me see his back."

The skin over the ribs was white and unmarked, free of all sores and blemishes. Darwin nodded, looked again at the white of the eye that showed beneath the lid, and sighed.

"You can let him lie back again. And you can tell some man or woman that I have never in my life seen an injured person better cared for. He has been fed, washed, exercised, and lovingly looked after. But his condition..."

"Tell me, Doctor," Maclaren's look was resolute. "Do not disguise it."

"I will not, though my medical opinion will bring bitter news for you. His wound will prove mortal, and his condition cannot be improved. It can only worsen, and you must not expect any waking from unconsciousness."

Maclaren clenched his teeth, and the muscles stood out along his jaw. "Thank you, Doctor," he said in a whisper. "An' the end, how far away will it be?"

"I can answer that only if you will give me some information. How long has he been unconscious? It is apparent that this is not a recent wound, with the degree of healing that it now exhibits."

"Aye, ye speak true there." Maclaren's face was grim. "Near three year, it has been. He was hurt in the summer of '73, and not wakened after that. We've tended him since then."

"I am sorry to end your hopes." Darwin drew the sheet back over the man on the bed. "He will die within the year. You brought me a long way for this, Malcolm Maclaren. Your devotion deserves a better reward."

Maclaren looked swiftly to the door, then back again. "What do ye mean, Doctor?"

Darwin waved his arm to door and window. "Let them all come in, if you wish. They are as worried as you are, and it serves no purpose to have them hide and listen outside."

"Ye think...." Maclaren hesitated.

"Come on, man, and do it." Darwin leaned again to look at the figure on the bed. "If you worry still about my state of knowledge and discretion, I could offer you a tale. It is a story of loyalty and desperation. Of a man, who might be this very man here" — he touched the smooth brow of the unconscious patient — "returned after many years to his home land. There was an accident. Let us put it that way, although a sword or axe could leave just such a wound. After the accident the man was lovingly cared for, and the doctors of these parts did all they could, but there was no progress in his condition. At last, despite daily exercise of muscles and the best food that could be found, he began to weaken,

to show signs of worsening. More expert advice and medical attention seemed to be the only hope. But how to obtain it, without revealing all and risking the wrath of a still-vengeful government?"

"Aye, how indeed?" said Maclaren. He sighed and walked over to the door. A few words of Gaelic, and a file of somber men and women into the room. Each went to the bed, knelt there for a moment, then moved back to stand by the wall. When all had entered, Maclaren spoke to them again, a longer speech this time. While Darwin watched, the faces in front of him seemed to fold and crumple as all hope drained from them.

"I have told them," said Maclaren, as he turned back to the bed.

Darwin nodded. "I saw it."

"They are brave folk. They will bear it bravely, whatever I tell them. But to ye I have told nothin', not one word, an' yet ye seem to know all. How can that be?" Maclaren's voice was husky but he held his head up high. "How can ye know this, as well as I know it? Are ye what Hohenheim has claimed to be, a man who can divine all by magical methods?"

"I would never claim what I believe impossible for any man." Darwin had moved forward again to the bed and was gently turning the head of the unconscious man. "I proceed by much simpler methods, ones available to all. Let me, if you will, continue with my tale. This man needed help, if help

could be found, from other physicians. It would be futile of me to plead excessive modesty and to deny that in the past few years my reputation as a court of last resort for difficult medical cases has spread throughout England — aye, and through Europe, too, if my friends are to be believed. Let us suppose it is true, and that my name was known here. Perhaps I could help, or at least tell the worst. But the idea of a direct approach, with a patient who was perhaps an outlaw and an exile — not to add that he is one of royal blood — why, that would be unthinkable. A subterfuge of some kind was necessary, one that would allow an examination without revealing too much. And if the patient could not easily be carried for a long distance, the presence of the physician in the Highlands must somehow be assured."

He paused and looked up at Maclaren. "Who was it worked out the details of the plan?"

Maclaren was sitting on the stone floor, his chin resting on his cupped hands. "It was I," he said softly. "An' God knows, it came from desperation, not from choosin'. But I still do not see how ye could know any of this."

"I was suspicious before I left Litchfield. You followed the first rule of successful deception: build upon what is real, and invent as little as you must. But you went too far, with a double lure, of great treasure and of a fantastic animal. The beast in Loch Malkirk would have been sufficient to bring me

here without further embroidery, but you could not have known that. So there was added the galleon and the priceless treasure, all to be revealed to me by the words of a dying man."

Maclaren smiled ruefully. "It worked. Ye came here, an' that was a surprise to me. So where was the error in it?"

"Your plan went astray not in outline, but in detail. You had hired good actors, that was necessary, and they were well-grounded in their roles — enough to convince Dr. Monkton. You had also told them to beware my examination, I surmise, since I would surely see through the deception. But Colonel Pole was there, and he was an accurate reporter. How could a tinker have the hands of a gentleman, or a delirious man suffer no fever?"

"We were not careful enough in choosin' — but still ye came, an' I don't see why ye did."

"The mystery that you had never intended brought me, more than treasure or Devil. Before we left Litchfield, I was asking myself, what would make anyone try to draw me here, three hundred miles from home? That curiosity was *my* motive, but what could *their* motive be? From the moment that we set out I was vastly curious, and when I arrived here my perplexity was increased. For here was Hohenheim, and I could not readily see how he fitted the situation at all."

Maclaren glanced around him at the circle of grieving faces. He shrug-

ged. "Dr. Darwin, I said that I will tell ye true, an' I will. But I swear by the man who lies there helpless before us — an' I know no higher oath than mine to Prince Charles Edward — I cannot tell why Hohenheim came. He was no part of my thoughts or plans, an' his arrival surprised me totally. I am sorry to disappoint ye."

"You do not," said Darwin. He had a satisfied look on his face. "What you have just told me fleshes out the picture, and I can tell you the answer myself. As to how Hohenheim knew at once that I was a doctor, upon my arrival, that is easy. You had told him, by referring without thinking to a 'Doctor Darwin' who was coming to Malkirk. Hohenheim thought of me that way from the time you did it — but when he first spoke, that knowledge perturbed me mightily. As for the rest, Hohenheim has been the unintentional confusion factor, the place where your plan suffered an accidental complication. Look back to the instrument by which your scheme was carried out — the hired players — and you will see the rest. Hohenheim —"

The boom of a cannon sounded through the quiet night, shockingly loud and near. Darwin and Maclaren looked at each other in confusion. There was a rush to the door of the house as the echo carried back from the eastern hills.

*It was not a Spanish galleon.* Jacob Pole was sure of it, sure as soon as he

saw the ship's lines by the light of the flare. Everything stood out clearly in that white and penetrating light, and even the crusting of silt and the deep corrosion of iron parts were not enough concealment. A man without naval experience might be fooled, because there were similarities enough to cause confusion; but Pole saw through those and was stunned by the knowledge. He was looking at a coastal cargo ship, high in the stern and with three masts, and he had seen many like it in English and Irish waters. It was not — could not be — the galleon they were seeking. And Hohenheim and Zumal did not know it!

Pole squatted by Little Bess and frowned down at the scene below. Zumal was down on the wreck's listing deck, prising at the forward hatch with a long iron bar. It was slowly opening and releasing a cloud of fine silt that fogged the water. Outside that cloud, the bed of the loch showed as a dazzling confusion of white sand and black rock. Above, Hohenheim was busy in the coble, lowering other tools and preparing a second underwater flare.

They did not know enough about ships to realize that this was not a wreck likely to bear treasure of any kind. But if they had discovered and were exploring the wrong ship, so much the better. The galleon must be somewhere else in the loch.

Pole nodded to himself and looked back along the length of the inlet. If he

had to search for another wreck, there could be no better time for it than now, when the floor of the loch was so brightly lit. The powerful light made every detail in the water visible for scores of yards. He could see schools of fish, flashing here and there in panic from the alien glare in the water. Away from the loch's entrance the whole underwater panorama was a frenzy of darting silver shapes. And a great shadow moved swiftly among them, scattering them wildly from its path.

The light allowed Jacob Pole to see what had been hidden from them the previous day. The Devil was speeding along, the crest of its back a couple of yards below the surface as it moved away from Zumal and the bright flare. Pole could see a small head and a long neck leading a massive body and powerful tail. The back was grey, and as it rolled to make a turn, there was a flash of pink on its sides, and brief sight of a red underbelly. It was at least seventy feet from head to tip of tail, and its swift forward motion came from the powerful body and winglike side fins.

The creature was flying blindly along the loch, seeking escape from the light. Its frenzied rush set up a big wave and brought the beast closer to the surface as it neared the inland end of the loch. The surface was foaming under the power of the lashing tail. As the Devil turned, the flare back at the loch entrance began to fade. A moment more, and the bow wave was racing back along the loch, with the beast

close enough to the surface for the smooth back to be revealed.

Hohenheim had the second flare ready, and Zumal was hanging on the side of the coble, taking breath before he dived again. They were both looking uncertainly along the water, not sure what was causing the sudden pattern of choppy waves.

Pole stood up and waved. "Hohenheim! Look out — you're in danger."

Without waiting to see the effects of his shout, he bent over the cannon. It took a second or two to line Little Bess to fire along the loch, and another second to strike the spark and apply the match at the breech. His hands were trembling with tension, and he could not control them.

The beast in the loch was less than fifty yards from the coble, and both men below were now aware of its rapid approach. Zumal cried out and tried to hoist himself into the coble, while Hohenheim left the second flare to burn in the bow while he took up the paddle and tried to move the boat away towards the safety of the shore. They were going too slowly. Pole glanced up and saw that the Devil's dash towards the sea would take it straight into the coble.

As he straightened to shout again, the cannon beside him roared and leapt backwards in recoil. He was surrounded by black smoke and could scarcely see where the ball went. The direction was good, but the timing a little too late. Instead of hitting the Devil's

body, the ball grazed the long tail and spent its energy uselessly in the waters of the loch. The beast leapt forward even faster.

A second shot would take minutes to make ready. Pole watched helplessly as the Devil surged frantically for the loch entrance.

The second flare was still alight. At the impact it flew high in the air. Fragments of the coble went with it, and Hohenheim's body spun away, the limbs loose and broken like a wrecked puppet. There was an agonized scream — Hohenheim or Zumal, Pole could not tell which — and a crash of splintered wood. Then the Devil's broad back was standing six feet above the surface of the water as the beast thrashed and wriggled its way open through the shallows to the sea. It headed west and plunged into the deep water beyond the reefs.

Jacob Pole did not wait to chart the course of the Devil's departure. He was running down the hill, with the cannon's blast and the human scream of final agony still loud in his ears.

The surface of the loch was calm again. There was nothing to be seen but the bobbing light of the flare and shattered remnants of the coble.

**A**t the sound of the cannon shot Malcolm Maclaren's face had turned white. He looked at the figure on the bed.

"If that is soldiers, an' him here...."

Already four or five of the men had run silently from the room. Maclaren gestured to the women, and they moved to lift the unconscious man from the bed and wrap him in blankets. Before they could reach him, Darwin stood in front of them, his hand raised.

"Hold this action, and your men, too. Maclaren, that came from the loch — from Colonel Pole. There may be trouble there, but it's no danger for you or for your Prince. If you want to send men anywhere, send them to the loch. That's where help is needed."

Logic had spoken to Maclaren faster than Darwin could. He had recalled the cannon that Pole had brought with him and carried to the loch. He shouted a command to the men outside, then moved swiftly over to the figure on the bed. There was a new hopelessness in his expression, as though he was fully realizing for the first time the import of Darwin's pronouncement on the future.

He bent to kiss the unconscious man's hand, then looked up at Darwin.

"Ye are right about Colonel Pole, an' my men will be at the loch in minutes. An' if ye are right about this other, he canna' be revived — ever. It makes no difference now if he is living or dead; if he remains like this, it's over. Our fight's all over an' done." The despair in his voice was total. Darwin moved to his side and laid a gentle hand on his shoulder.

"Malcolm Maclaren, I am truly sorry. If it will ease your mind at all, be

assured of this: Prince Charles Edward departed this world as a conscious, thinking human the moment that he took that injury. If you had found a way to transport me here to Scotland the very day that it happened, I could have done nothing for him."

"I hear ye." Maclaren rubbed a knuckle at his eyes. "The line is ended, an' now I must learn to bear it. But it comes hard, even though I've feared that word all these past three years. It is an end to all hope here."

"So help me to look to those who can still be assisted. Bring lamps, and let us go down to the loch." Darwin started for the door, then instinctively turned back to the bedside to pick up his medical case. Before he reached it, there was a shout and a commotion outside the house.

"Come on, Doctor," said Maclaren. "That's my men calling, something about Colonel Pole."

It took a few seconds to see anything after the bright lamps of the room. Darwin followed Maclaren and stood there blinking, peering up the hill to where the group outside was pointing. At last he could see a trio of Highlanders. In their midst and supported by two of them was a stumbling and panting Jacob Pole. He staggered up to Malcolm Maclaren and stood wheezing in front of him.

"Talk to your blasted men — I can't get them to understand plain English. Send 'em back to the loch."

"Why? Dr. Darwin was worried for

your safety there, but here ye are, safe an' well."

"Hohenheim and Zumal." Pole held his side and coughed. "At the loch, but I couldn't help. Both dead, in the water."

Maclaren barked a quick order to three of the villagers, and they left at a trot. While Pole leaned wearily on supporting arms, Darwin stood motionless.

"Are you sure?" he said at last. "Remember, there have been other examples where Hohenheim's actions were not what they appeared to be."

"I'm sure. Sure as I stand here. I saw the boat smashed to pieces with my own eyes. Saw Hohenheim broken, and both their bodies." He bent forward, rubbing at his balding head with a hand that still shook with fatigue. "The galleon they looked at was the wrong ship. I saw it, there's an empty hold in an old wreck, that's what they died for. The wrong ship. That's their end."

"Aye, the end indeed," said Maclaren. He was watching as a silent procession of women carried an unconscious body out of the black-shuttered house and away towards the main village. "An' a bitter end for all. Hohenheim came here of his own wish, but it was no plan of mine that would make him die here." He began to walk with head lowered after the women.

"Not quite the end, Malcolm Maclaren." Darwin's somber tone halted the Scotsman. "There is one more duty

for us tonight, and in some ways it is the most difficult and sorrowful of all. Give me ten more minutes of your time, then follow your lord."

"Nothing could be worse," said Maclaren. But he turned and came back to where Darwin and Pole stood facing each other. "What is left?"

"Hohenheim. He came here uninvited, and you asked why. You did not seek to bring him, and I certainly did not. He has been a mystery to all of us. Come with me, and we will resolve it now."

Followed by Pole and Maclaren, he led the way across the turf to the house where Hohenheim and his servant had stayed. The door was closed, and no light showed within.

Darwin stepped forward and banged hard on the dark wood. When no answer came he gestured to Maclaren to bring the lamp that he was holding nearer, and opened the door. The three men paused on the threshold.

"Who is there?" said a sleep-slurred voice from the darkness.

"Erasmus Darwin." He took the lamp from Maclaren, held it high, and walked forward to light up the interior.

"What do you want?" The man in the bed rolled over, pushed back the cover, and sat up. Jacob Pole looked at him, gave a superstitious groan of fear, and stepped backwards.

The man in front of them was Hohenheim. The tunic and patchwork cloak hung over a chair, but there could be no mistaking the hooked



nose, ruddy cheeks, and darting black eyes.

"It's impossible," said Pole. "Less than ten minutes ago, I saw him dead. It can't be, I saw —"

"It is all too possible," said Darwin softly. "And it is as I feared."

He leaned towards the man in the bed, who was now more fully awake and beginning to scowl at the intruders. "The deception is over. Hohenheim — for want of a true name I must continue to use your old one — we bring terrible news. There was an accident at the loch. Your brother is dead."

The red cheeks paled, and the man stood up suddenly from the bed. "You are lying. This is some trick, to try and trap me."

Darwin shook his head sadly. "It is no trick, and no trap. If I could find another way to say this, I would do so. Your brother and Zumal died tonight in Loch Malkirk."

The man in front of him stood for a second, then gave a wild shout and rushed past them.

"Stop him," cried Darwin, as Hohenheim plunged out of the door and into the night.

"Is he dangerous?" asked Maclaren.

"Only to himself. Send your men to follow and restrain him until we can reach him."

Maclaren moved to the door and shouted orders to the startled group of villagers who were still waiting near the black-shuttered house. Three of them set off up the hill in pursuit of

Hohenheim's running figure. When Maclaren came back into the room, Jacob Pole was slumped against the wall, his head bowed.

"Is he all right?" Maclaren said to Darwin.

"Give him time. He's overtired and he's had a great shock."

"I'm fine," Pole sighed. "But I've no idea what's going on here. I never saw any brother, or any deception. Are you sure you have an explanation for all this?"

"I believe that I do," Darwin walked around the room, studying the cases and boxes stacked against the walls. He finally stopped at one of them and bent to open it.

"Why did these men come to Malkirk?" he said. "That is easily answered. They came to seek treasure and the galleon. But there is a better question: *How* did they come — how did they know a galleon was in the loch? There is only one answer to that. *They heard it from the actors hired to tempt me here.* And is it not obvious that we have also been dealing with stage players here? You saw them and heard them. Think of the gestures, all larger than life, and of the hands that drew materials from the air. Their magic spoke to me strongly of the strolling magician, the attraction at the fairs and festivals throughout the whole of England."

"But how did you know their feats were not genuine?"

"Colonel, that would lie outside the

compass of my beliefs. It is much easier to believe in prestidigitation, in the cunning of hand over eye. I reached that conclusion early, but I was faced with one impossible problem. How could a man be here today, and a few hours later be in Inverness? No stage magic or trickery would permit that. Accept that a man cannot be in two places at once, and you are driven to a simple conclusion: there must be two men, able to pass as each other. Think of the value of that for impossible stage tricks, and think how practice would perfect the illusion. Two brothers, and Zumal as the link that would travel between them to protect it."

"But you had no possible proof," protested Pole. "I mean, a suspicion is one thing, but to jump from that to certainty —"

"Requires only that we use our eyes. You saw Hohenheim, at the village. And the next day you saw him again, at the loch. But in the village he favored his left hand, constantly — recall for yourself his passes in the air, and his seizing from nowhere of flasks and potions. Yet at the loch he had suddenly become *right-handed*, for casting lines, for working the boat, for everything. We were seeing brothers, and like many twins they were one *dexter*, and one *sinister*."

Maclaren was nodding to himself. "I saw it, but I had not the wit to follow it. Now one of them is dead, and the other...."

"Knows a grief that I find hard to

imagine. We must seek him now and try to give him a reason for living. He should not be left alone tonight. With your permission, I will stay here, and when he is brought from the loch, I will talk to him — alone."

"Very well. I will go now and see if they have him safely." Maclaren walked quietly to the door.

"And here is your proof," said Darwin. He lifted from the open chest in front of him a long cloak. "See the hidden pockets and the tube that can be used to carry materials from them to the hands. No supernatural power; only skills of hand, and human greed."

Maclaren nodded. "I see it. An' when ye find the reason that makes him want to go on livin', ye can tell it to me."

He left, and Jacob Pole looked across at Darwin. "Does he mean that? Why would he think to stop living?"

"He has had a bad shock tonight. But for him I do not worry. Malcolm Maclaren is a brave man, and a strong one. When he recovers from his present sorrow, his life will begin again — better, I trust, than before."

Pole went across to the empty bed and sat down on it with a groan. "I'll be glad when tonight is over. I've had too much excitement for one day. Let tomorrow come, and I can go to the loch again and seek the *real* galleon." His eyes brightened. "If there's one thing to pull from this sorry mess, perhaps it will still be the bullion."

Darwin coughed. "I am afraid not.

There is no treasure — no galleon. It was only a part of the tale that was used to draw us here."

"What!" Pole lifted his head. "Pox on it, are you telling me that after all our work we came three hundred miles for nothing? That there is no treasure?"

Darwin nodded. "There is no treasure. But we did not come for nothing." Now it was his eyes that showed a

sparkle of excitement. "There is still the Devil. Tomorrow we will go again to the loch and learn the true nature of that animal. For that I would travel far more than three hundred miles. I want to study the beast thoroughly, and determine what —"

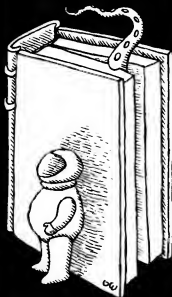
He paused. Something in Jacob Pole's unhappy look told him that the night's bad news was not yet complete.



MYTHICAL FAMILY OF FOUR

# Books

BARRY N.  
MALZBERG



Drawing by Gahan Wilson

*Dragons of Light*, edited by Orson Scott Card; Ace, \$7.95.

*Dragons of Darkness*, edited by Orson Scott Card; Ace, \$6.95.

*The Gandalaria Cycle: The Steel of Raithskar*, by Randall Garrett and Vicki Ann Heydrum; Bantam, \$2.25.

*All Darkness Met*, by Glen Cook; Berkley, \$1.95.

*Spacetime Donuts*, by Rudy Rucker; Ace, \$2.50.

*Deadly Silents*, by Lee Killough; Ballantine/Del Rey, \$2.25.

*A Storm Upon Ulster*, by Kenneth C. Flint; Bantam, \$2.50.

*Esbae: A Winter's Tale*, by Linda Halde-  
man; Avon, \$2.50.

*The Ptomaine Kid: A Hamburger Western*,  
by Conger Beasley, Jr.; Andrews & McMeel,  
Inc., \$6.95.

*On Writing Science Fiction*, by the editors  
of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Maga-  
zine*; Owlswick Press, \$17.50.

Dear Ed:

We have this music critic on the local daily; he's the kind of guy who doesn't review the work so much as *himself*. "The familiar Mahler First Symphony through which the orchestra labored brought back memories of first love and loss, yes, but poor dentistry could have produced more emotion as we shifted uneasily to the irregular beat" or "The young Russian oboist, delightful in her décolletage, made her contribution to the Quintet a lively one as the strands of music expanded." You get the idea. Rather con-

temptible I always thought (after all a reviewer's problems, like an oboist's decolletage, should be at a modest remove) and unfair to the performers also; it is a lapse I promised myself a long time ago I would not commit. The work was the issue, the reviewer modest filter (the literary critic may have a different obligation but, Ed, I ain't no critic), but what does one do, what is precisely the position to be taken when one encounters prose like:

"All eyes had turned to the shadows behind the dais. Mocker whirled in time for the advent of the Queen, Fi-ana Melicar Sardyga ip Krief. He hadn't seen her for years, despite her inexplicable habit of wandering the streets to poll Vorgreberg's commons..." (ALL DARKNESS MET, page 21).

"I wanted desperately to turn and run — but there was no place to run to. Only danger waited beyond the walls which surrounded me. A man named Worfit who might slit my throat for welching on a debt. One Zaddorn who might throw me into prison, or worse, because of some sacred bauble I knew nothing about ... I knew that I could not leave the great cat behind me if I fled..." (THE STEEL OF RAITHSKAR, page 51).

"His green dragon was as large as their own, but somehow it seemed small to Adara as she watched it climb upwards from the farm. With its wings fully extended, it was plain to see how badly injured it was; the right wing tip was charred and it leaned heavily to one side as it

flew..." (THE ICE DRAGON by George R. R. Martin from DRAGONS OF LIGHT, page 27).

You can see the problem, Ed. As a science fiction writer cast into querulousness by the incursion into the field of a kind of fantasy which, in less than a decade, has filled the interstices which used to be occupied by middle range action adventure, middle range imitative speculation, as a writer who views this phenomenon with alarm because the very definition and audience for traditional science fiction appear to have been debased by the substitution of fantastic for scientific hypotheses, it is very difficult not to carry this reaction into the work at hand. This would be no service because readers like this sort of material, the conglomerate editors assure us, the shift toward the fantastic has only been in response to shifts in public taste (and a whole lot of movies), and a disgruntled science fiction writer could have found as many reasons for disgruntlement in 1967 as 1982; the middle range was never very good, and the entire history of this genre has produced no more than half a dozen undisputed masterpieces in five and a half decades. The fact that all three of the quoted perpetrators have earned serious credentials as science fiction writers (and the third stands close to the perceived top of the field) only proves that professionals must go where the market resides, that's all.

No, I won't be like our music critic.

I won't review myself. I'll review the work at hand. But I feel kind of sick right now, Ed, so maybe I'll take a break from this and try to deal with it all when I feel a little more, uh, *objective*.

—Barry

Dear Ed:

Not sure, after having read Rudy Rucker's *Spacetime Donuts* which Ace Books and the Panshins assure me is the work of "a clever and innovative" writer who has "busted free of all the linearities and restrictions of modern science fiction" that I even had a grasp of what this thing called modern science fiction is anymore, I opened *On Writing Science Fiction* to try to pick up some tips from the editors of your honored competitor on how I might be able to break into the field. A blind pseudonym and a post office box in a strange city might amount to a fresh start that in a few years could lead me, with luck, to *The Warlords of the Underneath* quatologies. The three authors of this book are George Scithers, editor of *Isaac Asimov's* and two of his editorial assistants, John M. Ford and Darrell Schweitzer; included are twelve first sales from the magazine and a lot of very brisk, very useful advice. Use one side of 8½ x 11 bond paper. Type double spaced. Begin in the middle of things. Don't flash back unless you absolutely have to. Don't tell the editor that you must have 10 cents a word or that your brother-in-law is

famous. Research your stories but don't drown them in boring detail. Always enclose return postage. And don't be discouraged (Isaac Asimov tells me that himself in his preface); ninety-nine percent of stories are rejected, but it's never personal and it is because they are not very good. If you write a good one, Scithers, Ford and Schweitzer will be happy to publish it.

Submitted in evidence are the twelve first sales with afterwords by their authors and the editors; there are plenty of market tips in those afterwords and in the chapters on the technique of writing, but the best market tips, to a self-involved old maneuverer like myself are those which are implied in the stories: if you want to break the market (or at least *Isaac Asimov's* share of it) forget about the grabber first paragraph or the audacious hypotheses, fix instead upon some old idea or famous role model and rewrite it comfortably. Do not attempt any stylistic technique with which John W. Campbell (or Ben Hibbs) would have been uncomfortable, do not risk a single conception that was not within the perimeters of the field by 1953, at the latest. Sally A. Sellers, "Perchance To Dream," (which the editors call the best story in the book, and I agree) uses an old anguished immortal ploy which Kuttner had used up by 1946 ("There Will Be Time," if anyone is interested), runs it through the framework of Wilmer Shiras' "Children of the Atom" and pays it off as P.J. Plau-

ger did not choose to in "Child of All Ages;" it is careful, pleasant work and it could have appeared in any magazine in this field at any time within the last four decades. Francis E. Izzo's "Tank," a good example of the middle range, is "Killdozer" by way of "Dreaming Is A Private Thing." K.W. MacAnn, Cam Thornley and Richard Bozarth contribute jokes.

As a new writer seeking a career in what is left of this genre in 1982, I could seek and obtain much worse advice than that which *On Writing Science Fiction* has to offer; it makes of this most complex and perhaps most tragic forms of literature too much of a genial parlor game for my taste (Isaac Asimov's clearly believes in the story as gimmick), but it is a reasonable manual for the unpracticed or semi-practiced and I wish that Rudy Rucker had read it. Rucker, the author of *White Light*, a first novel which obtained a good deal of attention for this genre (Thomas M. Disch reviewed it here some months ago), has attempted a novel which will both incorporate and satirize the cutting edge of modern neutron and mathematical theory (he has the credentials, a doctorate in mathematics and an apparent grasp of sophisticated Godelian Theory, Boolean algebra and the like), but he has neglected characterization or viable plot. Like so many of the kind of novels dependent upon invention and attitude, *Spacetime Donuts* breaks down early into episodism; Vernor

Maxwell is the Brautigan/Robbins version of saint as goofball, but the lack of interior is compensated as in the case of most inexperienced writers with an ever more desperate invention to keep the plot moving. Phillip K. Dick can do this kind of thing, and so could A.E. Van Vogt early in his career because of the degree of obsessiveness and the apparent endlessness of their inventive gift, but Rucker is an uneasy stylist (a constructor rather than a writer at this stage of his game), and simple narrative prose, let alone structure and motivation, does not come easy to him.

*Spacetime Donuts*, which carries Maxwell and his computer-amanuensis Phizwiz to the ends of all circumstantiality, the unravelling of time and space, is a draft for a novel, a compendium of ideas and approaches. It is not a novel; it is not finished work and although an editor may be doing a beginning writer a service in publishing obviously flawed or tentative material, the audience (assuming that the audience for science fiction can tell the difference; this may be a risky proposal) is not being similarly assisted. What *Spacetime Donuts* has in its favor is energy and the fact that like even the worst of science fiction, it is *about* something; it has the core of an idea and an impetus.

This separates it severely from most of the other material under review which is (as James Blish once accused the majority of literary short

stories) about nothing at all, but I still do not feel sufficiently impersonal, Ed; images of that oboist are beginning to distort the Boolean Line, as Vernor Maxwell might say, and so I will knock off once again until I am in more detached frame of mind before grappling with the issue of fantasy as opposed to science fiction.

—Barry

Dear Ed:

"The vision of genius" Bellow's title character mumbles in *Herzog*. "becomes the cant of intellectuals." "The passions of legend," I might venture in codicil, "become the assignment-work of professionals." Orson Scott Card's two anthologies contain two dozen stories about dragons, and illustrations of the stories that sometimes visualize in a way that the writers could not (*Dragons of Light*, the first volume, has the illustrations in color); the tables of contents contain some of the most respectable names in science fiction — George R.R. Martin, Zelazny, Bishop, Bova, Bryant, Vinge — as well as a number of newcomers and decent writers of the second rank. The stories are conscientiously, sometimes painfully rationalized in terms of the subject matter, and not one of them has a shred of the power and conviction which Anne McCaffrey brought to *Dragonflight* and its successors, which have been enormously successful in a way, I venture to suggest, that these anthologies never will be.

The difference is crucial: McCaffrey is a limited and limiting writer but she *believes* in her dragons, and her creations were self-willed; *Dragonflight* (or for that matter a kind of predecessor, Jack Vance's Hugo-winning 1962 *The Dragon Masters*) were not cobbled up in response to some editor's call for a series of stories about dragons but emerged from the interior of the writer at some point where imagination and desire fused. That writers like Martin and Bova have responded to the summons is signatory only of the professional's willingness to meet the standards of the market, but the anthologies themselves, with the possible exception of Joan D. Vinge's "The Storm King," are composed of materials which fit the only definition of hackwork which I understand and am willing to accept: they are written at the bottom of an author's purposes solely for the purpose of meeting a market which the writer has not created but only seeks to exploit.

There is no harm in anthologies like this; they are no more pernicious or debasing to the Higher Good than *The Empire Strikes Back* or *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (and demand a focusing of attention, a kind of literacy which the media do not), and the illustrations are occasionally attractive, but the kind of mentality which harmlessly underlies *Dragons of Light/of Darkness* manifests a darker possibility when it is responsible for the creation of hundreds of fantasy novels written to the order



of the market by writers who, left to their own devices, would know better and could do better work.

Randall Garrett wrote some very respectable science fiction and showed a touch for whimsical, eccentric fantasy in his Lord D'Arcy Series, but Garrett, for all of his resourcefulness, is hopelessly at sea in *The Steel of Raithskar*, which is a mechanically written and exhausted representation of what is now politely called Heroic Fantasy. The collaborative efforts of Vicki Ann Heydron, his wife, although certainly seamless, do not help him along, and the novel is evidence of the chilling possibility that genre fantasy has only taken a decade in the mass market to reach the level of cynicism, reiteration and self-exploitation that it took category science fiction at least thirty years to reach. Glen Cook's *All Darkness Met* has, at least, a passion and conviction which Garrett/Heydron cannot simulate, but the Dread Empire is a sadistic and only intermittently imagined version of counter-Earth, and the obsessiveness which has driven Cook, a competent writer, through this 115,000 word third book in an open-ended series cannot occlude the narrowness of the landscape nor the fact that all of these perpetrators and imitators have not been able to take the barbarian fantasy much beyond where the clumsy but driven Robert E. Howard left it almost half a century ago. Kenneth C. Flint, not a figure in our field, sets his counter-

Earth in Ireland, uses Celtic rather than Oedipal myth, but the slight distinction of background and material does not disguise the barren and imitative nature of the enterprise, and Flint does not have Garrett's cunning.

*The Ptomaine Kid* by Conger Beasley, Jr. and *Esbae*, by Linda Haldeman are examples of novels that want to dance but can only trudge; the net for Haldeman's work of demoniac obsession and subtle sexual entanglement is its categorization as fantasy whose readers, the editors likely suspect, will take almost anything so packaged and labelled and not to able to tell the difference between movement and paralysis. Nothing, however, can save *The Ptomaine Kid*, which is published as a literary novel in trade paperback by a small publisher who is apparently under the delusion that this is saleable to the whacked-out, duffel-bag, pass-me-the-joint audience imagined to be the gang eating up *Another Roadside Attraction* or *Little America*. This one is about Hoby Tibbs, a middle-aged hamburger chef gifted with the ability to cure bad meat; Hoby hits the road on an odyssey, and if in outline this sounds promising, in treatment it is absolutely dolorous as Beasley commits the beginner's mistake of first adapting but then trying to rationalize an outrageous premise. Lurching, unevenly voiced and awkward, this novel only gives credence to the intimation that if one is going to be a bad writer, one might as well do it within a recognizable and

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protective genre historically receptive to bad writing, which will make the weakness defensible as a conformation to the market.

I think real bad things are happening in our field, Ed, but the fact that *The Ptomaine Kid's* author could learn a few things from even *The Steel of Raithskar* (let alone *George Scithers*) gives me yet a smidgen of hope. At least, until judgement day, we science fictionists and fantasists can blame it all on the goddamned market.

—Barry

Dear Ed:

I see that I didn't mention Lee Killough's *Deadly Silents* in the review (which I was about to deliver) and for good reason: what is a perfectly de-

cent, well-crafted, mildly provocative science fiction novel not unreminiscent (in gimmicking if not style) of Bester's *The Demolished Man* doing in with this bunch? Killough better watch it; next time around she'll be writing for *Dragons, Dragons Forever*. This is competent work by a writer who, despite several novels and a slew of short stories, is just beginning to attain visibility in the field. I assume that Berkley will have her signed up for the decalogue set on Brawling Earth by the time this sees print.

Maybe our local music critic has a point. If you stick to reviewing yourself there are obvious limits to one's bitterness.

—Barry

George Alec Effinger (*"Maureen Birnbaum, Barbarian Swords-person,"* January 1982) returns with a story about the implications of discovering that there isn't any life elsewhere in the universe. Mr. Effinger's most recent book is *THE WOLVES OF MEMORY* (Putnam).

# Opening Night

BY

GEORGE ALEC EFFINGER

**W**e are sitting around the pool, waiting for the Men to do whatever it is that they are so anxious to do. It is some ritual or ceremony of theirs. The greater moon has risen and bathes the pool with cold silver light. The lesser moon, the impetuous siren, hurtles through the heavens and fires our passions so that we are almost insane with the delay. The Men inspire awe and sometimes fear, but we cannot avoid a certain exasperation every now and again. One of the Men is dismissing our annoyance. He is saying that when we come to know them better, everything will be clear and we will learn to live together in peace and harmony. This ritual of theirs had better begin soon, or a few of the youngsters in the back of the gathering place will die beneath the impatient claws of the ushers.

Crorl is telling me that unless he

can drink from the pool he will do something frantic like tear down the offensive curtain the Men have erected across the front of the gathering place. I tell Crorl that he will have to wait, that the ritual must be about to begin — listen, I say, there are small noises coming from the little translator box on our stone. Crorl just grimaces and is turning away. He is not interested in the little noises. Nor am I, but I am not suffering from thirst, either. Crorl is standing now, his tail flicking, and he flexes his limbs and moves quietly toward the back of the gathering place. I am listening for the sharp cry from one of the youngsters. Soon Crorl will return.

Blalt is pointing toward the curtain. It is heavy and foul-smelling and a disgusting russet color, the shade of a child's blood dried upon one's robes of worship. The curtain is billowing as if

Men are moving back and forth behind it. If this is true, I look forward to the beginning of the ritual. I look forward to living together in peace and harmony and to going home and feeding. The lesser moon is plummeting toward the horizon, and we all feel more comfortable. Crorl is easing himself through the crowd to his place, and everyone is relaxing in anticipation of the Men's ceremony.

At last. Another Man is appearing through a part in the curtain. He is speaking into a little translator box, and his voice, laden with the humorous, decadent accent of the East, is leaping at us from our own boxes. The Man says, "I hope you are well-fed, sexually satisfied, and free from parasites." We are now applauding his politeness, although I am waiting to see just a bit more of the power and majesty of these people. I have seen little until now because my season's brood hatched almost on the very day of the arrival of the Men, and so I have been shut up in my burrow. Tonight is the first opportunity I've had to witness the Men firsthand, although everyone has told me again and again how devastating their glory is. I am keeping my opinion to myself, because if the curtain is any indication of their glory, I would be just as well-advised to return to my home and begin next season's brood.

"We bring you greetings from our home among the stars," says the Man. This means little to me.

"Men do not have but one world," explains Blalt. He is leaning too near our box, and his words are emerging from the Man's box on stage, transformed into the loud, strident speech of the Men.

"That is true," says the Man. "We live on many worlds around many stars, from one end of the sky to the other."

Blalt is signaling to me. He is more careful to whisper this time. "I will tell you about worlds and stars later," he says. "It is a staggering delusion."

I wish I understood. I am bored. I am thinking of all the youngsters in the rearmost places and my claws twitch.

"In our desire to introduce you to our culture and our people," says the Man, "we present for you a work of our greatest *dramatist*" — the Man's word means nothing to us, and the translator box cannot find an appropriate substitute in our language — "a Man named William Shakespeare. This Man was able to create *plays* that transcend social differences and speak to people of all times and cultures about those things that make us all one. No one in our history has better sketched our strengths and our weaknesses, our ambitions, our fears, and our innate nobility. Therefore we offer for your entertainment tonight, the first in a series of cultural evenings, *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare. Thank you."

I am laughing and laughing. Crorl is glancing in my direction, his own

bloody mouth smiling and forming words I cannot understand.

"Men are so amusing," says Ubbra. "Did you hear what they call that big silver thing they came in? The fire arrow? Did you hear what the Men call it?"

"No," I say, reminding Ubbra, the fool, that I have been in my burrow, bound and immobile, for ten days.

"They call it a 'wagon.' Isn't that dear?"

"A wagon?"

"A wagon from the sky. They sound just like Pulib. Do you remember? That leader from Cosnathanuathicor."

"The one we ate two seasons ago in the flood?" I ask. My memory is never very good soon after the hatching.

"No," says Ubbra. "The one we ate when the clouds burned."

I am remembering now, but it occurs to me that it may not be the Man who calls his fire arrow a 'wagon,' but merely the little translator box. After all, I've heard that Men are possessors of wonderful things. Would these Men speak like eastern dunghill cretins?

Look. The Man is going back behind the curtain. All movement is stopping. There is silence and tension pressing down on the gathering place like informal death. They are coming now, the Men, they will share with us their secrets and their power. They will walk through the curtain and the glory will dazzle us until morning. The greater moon rides higher now, and his constant bitter light exalts us.

When the Men show themselves again, we shall be filled with a great turmoil, as if the lesser moon had somehow managed to fling herself yet again into the night-black sky.

Look. It is happening. The curtain is parting—

"I cannot bear it," whispers Crol in a peculiar moaning voice.

—the curtain is parting and there are many Men, many, many Men crowded together. My eyes open wide and my breathing stops. I can only stare at the scene. There are so many! One Man is a wonder, a miracle. So many make my claws twitch, my throat dry and lusting for the hot, strong blood.

The Men are wearing many kinds of colored materials on their bodies, but in no evident overall design. It makes no sense, it is telling us nothing about them. I am looking at the confusion at the front of the gathering place, and I am hoping that one of the Men will tell me what it means. The Man promised that this ritual would communicate something valuable about Men. So far I am only bewildered. I am looking around now and see that Crol is lost as well, and Blalt and the others. Two of the Men are at the front of the crowd and wear little translator boxes. All the others are walking back and forth across the enclosed area the Men have taken for themselves. One of the Men is lifting his box to his mouth. "Away! Go home, you idle creatures, get you home!" he says.

There is immediate agitated hissing throughout the gathering place. I am astonished once more. Is he reviling us? Is this how Men see us? As "creatures?" Are they coldly exercising their power? Many of us believe so, because everyone around me is slowly rising and leaving the gathering place. I have decided that we have been given a command, although it seems absurd to obey an order dressed in the dialect of fools.

The Man is staring at us. Is this confusion what he wants? Have the Men assembled us here only to tell us to go home again? What does this say about Men? How do they expect us to respond? It must be that we are not so civilized and sophisticated as the Men. It is as I feared: they *are* gods, after all, and they are delighting in humiliating us. If they are seeking devotion from us, they will learn that they are proceeding in the wrong way. All they are earning for their trouble is doubt and resentment.

The Man is raising his arms into the air. His face is shiny with perspiration. He seems excited, angry, frustrated, or aroused. It is difficult to say which, because I haven't had the chance to study the moods of Men. He is lowering one arm and speaking into the translator box. "Please, please," he is saying. "I was not telling you to leave. I was speaking to these other Men here with me. This is only a *play*. You must not think that our words are directed to you. You must *pretend* that we are do-

ing these things on our own world, in another time, and that you aren't even present. That is the job of an *audience*."

There are a few more words that cannot be translated. Still, it angers me and I hear sounds throughout the gathering place that indicate many others are having the same reaction. The Men think so little of us that they ask us to believe that we aren't present. We, who know better. We must conform our own self-images to the picture the Men have of us. My tail is flicking. I am certain the young ones will have terrible night. In the morning we will surely have to begin all our season's work again.

The Men seem satisfied that we understand. I am not so sure. I, for one, do not understand, at least not sufficiently. But I sit down once more, as do Blalt and Crorl and all of the others, and the ritual continues. Men are speaking to Men, ignoring us as if we were nothing but mudworms. The second Man says, "And do you not preen your coats? And do you not abandon the breeding burrow? And do you not offer up choice flesh to one who comes in triumph over Pompey's blood?"

There is an immediate response to the mention of Pompey's blood. The moaning grows, from the front of the gathering place toward the back, where the youngsters cringe and chatter in terror. The Man is going on, still heedless of our needs. "Be gone!" he cries, but this time we are not obeying

him. "Run to your burrows, fall upon your bellies, implore the moons to hold back the sickness that must punish this ingratitude."

"Explain this to me," murmurs Blalt. "The Man told us not to pay attention to the commands he issues, that they are for the other Men. But now surely the Man is speaking to us."

"Do not move," I say. "We must learn for certain. If we stay here and it is against his wishes, he will speak more plainly." We are waiting, but the Man doesn't even notice us. The first Man addresses him, making worse this wearisome confusion. On and on they speak. Now, though, they are finished. They are leaving the space at the front of the gathering place. It is over. Now—

I am wrong. After a brief respite, more and different Men are appearing. They speak, and like the others they take no notice of us. Perhaps this ritual does not, after all, concern us. Perhaps it is just something the Men need to perform to guarantee their health or their harvest of fish, and it holds no special significance for us at all.

"I shall remember," says one Man. "When Caesar says 'do this,' it is performed."

What a great growl of relief is enveloping the gathering place! For the first time we find a common ground with the Men. They have leaders, too. Perhaps they are chosen the same way and eaten as ours. If this is true, then the Men were correct in inviting us to

their ritual. How generous it is of them! How gracious! How hospitable! But is it a choosing or an eating? We cannot expect their ways to be exactly like ours. I look at Crorl. He too is fascinated again. I hope that it is an eating, although of course there cannot be enough for everyone. The Men's gesture is sufficient.

"Why don't they just knock him on the head and have done with it?" asks Ubbra, the idiot.

I am making a little hiss of annoyance. Blalt saves me the trouble of explaining. "The Men must do things in their own way," whispers Blalt. "They are showing us how gods behave. They are saying that we should emulate them."

"All this talk?" says Ubbra, his tail flicking just a bit. "We'd be consumed by disaster if our eatings took as much time as this."

The Man named Cassius is speaking. I have followed his complaints closely and I am puzzled. I am quite positive that he is speaking of the leader of the Men, but the king of the gods sounds hopelessly unfit. One of two things must be true: either the king of the Men is a crippled weakling, or Cassius is an artful liar. I do not understand why the Men permit them both to live. One or the other ought to be sacrificed for the benefit of the community of Men.

"Once, upon a raw and gusty day," this Cassius is saying, "the troubled Tiber was assaulting its banks, and

Caesar said to me, 'Do you dare Cassius, leap in with me into this angry flood and swim across to that point?' At his word, dressed as I was, I plunged in and told him to follow. So indeed he did. The torrent roared, and we did attack it with youthful strength, cutting through it and conquering it with our competitive joy. But before we had reached our goal, Caesar cried, 'Help me, Cassius, or I will drown!' Then I, as Aeneas our great ancestor bore upon his back the old Anchises from the flames of Troy, so from the waves of Tiber did I bear the tired Caesar. And this Man has now become a god, and Cassius is a wretched creature who must bend his body if Caesar carelessly but nods to him."

What horror! The Men are inviting slaughter. They must be insane, or determined on suicide. Here Cassius is telling the world that his king, Caesar, is less fit to rule than the sickest runt of the litter. I cannot understand how Caesar could ever have been chosen in the first place, but even granted that among Men it could happen, why would they proclaim their vulnerability to us?

"Perhaps they have committed a great crime," says Crorl. "Maybe they have come to us for cleansing, and the meaning of this ritual is the expiation of their guilt. We may be the form of execution they have chosen."

I am struck silent by this idea. Is it a great honor, more than we can comprehend? It would seem so. Should we

rush the front of the gathering place and rend them all now? Or is it proper to let the Men continue with their speaking? Will they give us a signal that they are prepared to die? Our ignorance is great, and I fear that the Men do not understand this.

"Ye gods!" cries Cassius. "It amazes me that a Man of such a feeble temper should overwhelm the majestic world and gain possession of the breeding females alone."

I quite agree. Perhaps we should spare this Cassius. He is the only Man I have heard who seems to have good sense. My claws twitch as I watch him. The Men are grotesque in body, but this Cassius is somehow attractive. The sight of Men, their voices, their smells, are revolting, yet Cassius arouses sympathy in me. I thirst for him.

Now, suddenly, the Man Caesar enters again with others. How I fear the Man, what he is and what he means. Because of Caesar, our people must decide the fate of gods. Cassius the wise one has put the case well — Caesar is not a fit leader. But Cassius too is short-sighted: a community that chooses someone as inferior as Caesar to be its leader does not deserve to live. Perhaps only I have come to the realization of what we must do. Otherwise the adults in the gathering place would already have leapt upon the Men and the foreign blood would even now be upon our claws and teeth. I am listening to Caesar's words, hoping that



there will be some way to save Cassius from the doom that has marked the other Men.

Caesar is talking to the Man, Antony. "Let me have Men about me that are fat," says Caesar. "Men with sleek coats, and such that sleep in the heat of the day. Yon Cassius has a lean and hungry look; he thinks too much: such Men are dangerous."

Caesar, so blind, so stupid! He doesn't know where the danger lies. It will not come from Cassius, but from us.

"Fear him not, Caesar," says Antony, "he's not dangerous. He is a noble Roman and does not poach another's fish."

"Would he were fatter! But I fear him not."

Blalt is flicking his tail. "Listen," he says in a low, urgent voice, "this is a strange sort of choosing. It seems that Caesar is a bad leader, and these other Men know it and are talking about how terrible it is that he is leader. But they chose him themselves, did they not? I am beginning to think that Men are not gods, but merely clever fools."

"That is what I've decided too," whispers Crorl. "If they are fools, they must die. All of them."

I want to say something in defense of my Cassius, but there is nothing to be said. Blalt is right, I am afraid.

"Here," says Ubbra, "here is the story of Caesar's choosing."

"I can let myself be eaten as easily as tell you about it," a Man is saying.

"It was mere foolery; I did not think it was meant very seriously. I saw Mark Antony offer him a black robe of leadership; yet it wasn't a black robe truly but a hastily sewn garment. And, as I told you, he rejected it once, but nevertheless I believe he really wanted it."

I am hearing another warning hiss from many throats.

"Then Antony offered it to him again, and he rejected it again, but I believe he hated to let it go from this claws. And then he offered it a third time and he rejected it a third time. And as he refused it, the crowd growled and their tails filcked and many youngsters perished in the excitement because Caesar refused the robe. And Caesar was himself almost overcome, for he fainted and fell down at it. And for my own part I couldn't laugh, for fear of opening my mouth and spilling a single drop."

Blalt, Crorl, and Ubbra are looking at me, as though I have the clue to explain the Men's behavior. Caesar is surely one who ought to have been killed as a pup. He should never have been allowed to leave the burrow, to grow to adulthood. But even if we grant him life, there is no excuse for the Men to clamor and thrust honor upon him. Even as they present him with the black robe, he faints! And yet Caesar still lives.

"I was confused at first," says Crorl. "Then I was filled with doubt. But the doubt has passed away and left me only annoyed with these Men."

That must be the common response of our fellows in the gathering place. Many are standing, snarling deep in their throats. Claws twitch, tails flick, there are many, many anguished screams from the rearward stones.

Ubbra looks thoughtful, a trick of his that fools all but those who know him well. "The Men are saying that Caesar is a disgrace to himself and to them as well. They are asking us to rid them of this offensive weakling. They are begging us to perform their eating for them."

The very concept is repulsive. I shudder. Observing the Men at their eating is a joyous occasion, but performing it in their place is a perversion of all morality. Only Ubbra could have thought of such a thing. neither Blalt nor Crorl feels it is worth responding to Ubbra. I will not either.

The Men have gone and been replaced by others. There is thunder and lightning. Men are speaking, and we listen, and the night is growing deeper. The greater moon is riding slowly through the silver clouds. I am sensing a great thirst in me and I know that I will not be able to resist any longer. I am listening to the words from the translator box, but I discover that I am standing, staring back over the heads of the others. I am seeking something in the rear of the gathering place. My claws are jerking spasmodically. I am lurching through the crowd, and my heartbeat is growing louder and louder. My eyes seem veiled with a red

mist, and my throat is dry and constricted. I must drink, I must soothe my tortured mind. I know I am staggering, and an usher comes to my side, helping me among the stones. I am barely conscious, I cannot even—

—down again. Crorl is looking at me and I sigh. My claws are covered with blood, and there is blood drying on the soft fur of my chest. I am calm and at peace now, and in a moment I will take up again my involvement with the Men's ritual. There is a strong, pleasant taste in my throat. Later I will sleep well.

At the front of the gathering place more Men are speaking to each other. The ritual goes on and on. Men argue and debate, but nothing seems to be decided. My patience is waning. Soon the greater moon will disappear, and the pleasant blackness of the sky will begin to lighten into the sickly blue of the day. The Men must know that they are in danger, yet they bicker without seeming to care at all about our changes in mood. Rarely do they even look into our faces. We are all but forgotten, but I am certain that at the end the Men will remember us well, in the brief moment of life that they have left.

My Cassius is speaking. "Decius, well urged," he says. "I think it is not right that Mark Antony, so well-beloved of Caesar, should outlive Caesar." This makes me very sad. Cassius is showing himself to be a common intruder and stealer of food and females. Ridding the community of Caesar is

right and even necessary. But Antony is an adult male with his own females and feeding territory. Killing him before he accepts the black robe is an affront to all moral creatures. It is an abomination, and I am grieved that it is Cassuis's suggestion. It is something I would have expected from another of these unholy Men. "Let Antony and Caesar fall together," says Cassuis.

The Man Brutus is shaking his head and frowning. "Our course will seem too bloody, Caius Cassuis," he says. Too bloody! How little of the truth does he guess! Blalt laughs softly. Crorl too is amused. "To cut the head off and then hack the limbs—"

All over the gathering place adults are leaping up in anger. This is beyond the acceptable limit. The air is filled with hissing and growls, until even the Men are noticing. This eating has become perverted and disgusting. My own stomach is sick, and the bitter taste of bile fills my mouth.

"—for Antony is but a limb of Caesar—" We all breathe deeply and relax a bit. As we learn to understand the contorted speech of Men, it becomes clear that often they say things they do not believe. They lie, they smear filth upon the truth by saying things that mean other things. They do not, after all, intend to dismember their leader at his eating. By "limb" they meant Antony, that Antony was a favorite of Caesar. But comprehending this style of speech does not make it any more pleasant or virtuous. The gathering

place will be in grave need of a cleansing when this ritual is finished. It will take a great act to restore its sanctity.

"Let us be sacrificers, but not butchers, Caius," Brutus is saying. "We all stand up against the *spirit* of Caesar, and in the *spirit* of Men there is no blood."

Crorl is turning to look at me. I catch Blalt's wide, staring eyes. The gathering place is silent, as quiet as if there were no one at all at the stones. Even the youngsters have fallen still. "In the *spirit* of Men there is no blood," he said. I heard those words, I am not mistaken.

"Never in my entire life have I heard such blasphemy," murmurs Ubbra. "Not even when Nasinna claimed that—"

"Please, Ubbra," says Crorl with a shudder.

"No blood," whispers Blalt, still unbelieving.

"Let us leap upon them now," I say.

Crorl is pretending to be absorbed in grooming his fur. "I think I would feel befouled," he says softly.

The deadly silence is continuing, through which only the words of Brutus are ringing. "But, alas, Caesar must bleed for it!"

A general growl. The rage in the gathering place is growing, yet the Men are still oblivious. What is their truth? Which are their lies? If there is no blood in the *spirit* of Men, how may Caesar bleed?

We will find out. We will learn if Men may bleed.

Let's carve him as a dish fit for the gods," Brutus is saying, "not hew him as a carcass fit for sheels."

How Men must enjoy toying with their lives! They provoke our fury, then, unafraid, exaggerate their crime and urge our wrath on to almost unmanageable strength. Surely they know what they are doing. I find myself wishing that I understood why they are pleading for slaughter. This is not an eating but a massacre, and I do not like the thought of the impending end of these savage creatures. They infuriate me, yes, I admit that, but they are doing it intentionally, cleverly, with just the right words and ideas to make us all mad with hatred. I can only feel that if it weren't for their collective wish for death, the Men might have been great friends to us, teachers and traders and burrow-mates. It will be a great loss.

Crorl is leaning his head close to mine. "Let me tell you what I fear most," he whispers.

"What we all fear," I say.

"Is that true? Has it occurred to you too?"

I stare at the Men. Brutus is speaking with his female. I turn back to Crorl. "If this is an eating, then the Men are afraid of some catastrophe. Caesar cannot have been leader very long. He would have been offered up before now. This eating has a more ominous meaning."

"Yes," says Crorl. "And I am afraid that unless they hurry, these Men are going to trap us along with them in their catastrophe, whatever it is."

"Could they be so arrogant, so cruel?"

"They are Men," Crorl says, in the same tone that he might say, "They are only youngsters." Men are no longer gods to us. They are creatures of nature, just as we are. But there our similarity ends. The glory of Men vanished at the beginning of this ritual. Now they stand as low in our estimation as the redskips that steal our food — except that we do not hate the insensible redskips.

"We must wait," says Blalt. "We must permit them to finish their ritual. Then they all must die, Caesar, Antony, Brutus, all of them, and the females and the nameless ones as well."

"How I have come to hate them tonight," says Ubbra.

"If only they had had an eating before coming here," I murmur. "If only Caesar had been sacrificed. With Cassius as their leader, or Antony or Brutus, everything would have been different. But the minutes, the hours slip by, and Caesar still struts before us, an emblem of the falseness and timidity of Men."

Caesar and his female are addressing each other in the dim light at the front of the gathering place. She twitters at him, he natters in response. She is telling him of the awful sights and sounds that fill the air. Corpses are walking

and fierce Men fight upon the clouds. We believe none of this, of course. We see nothing of what she describes. We are past belief. Blood drizzled upon the Men's gathering place, she says. A dream only. A tepid wish. And Caesar is replying that cowards die many times before their death — if he wants to put that to the test, I will volunteer to help him on his way the first time.

"Of all the wonders that I yet have heard, it seems to me most strange that Men should fear," says Caesar stupidly. "Seeing that death, a necessary end, will come when it will come." And still these Men delight in revealing their foolishness and their juvenile ignorance.

Already the fainter stars have sought their daytime burrows. The night is over. Soon the bloodless sun will climb over the gathering place, and evil will be loose in the world. Yet the Men talk on—

"Enough," says Blalt.

"I have had enough," says Crorl. He is standing. His tail is not merely flicking; no, it is lashing from side to side, and his claws clutch, desperate for the joy of ripping flesh.

Around me many others are standing, rocking slowly back and forth, making a moaning sound that echoes in waves from the front to the back of the gathering place. I am standing now. My tail is cutting the heavy air and I add my voice to the moan.

The Men refuse to notice us.

I am taking a small step forward.

Crorl, Blalt, and Ubbra are doing the same. Hundreds, thousands of us are moving toward the space where the Men perform their loathsome ritual. One step. Another. Nearer, slowly, nearer. From the left, from ahead of me, the translator boxes are spitting out the voices. I am taking another step.

We are crowding close to the Men. Our moaning is a fierce wail.

"Most high, most mighty and puissant Caesar," says a Man, and these obvious lies anger us still more. "Metellus Cimber throws before thy seat an humble heart—"

Our moaning stops. We are waiting. Our minds are filled with one yearning hope. A heart! The Man will throw a hero's heart, and Caesar will eat, and he will be transformed. There is silence. We are waiting for the salvation of Caesar and of the race of Men.

"I must prevent thee, Cimber," says Caesar, sealing his fate, and once more we are pressing forward, our claws clicking and our tails beating like limber boughs in the storm. Caesar, Brutus, and the lamentable Cassius are almost within our grasp. Some of us are reaching forward, feverish and hungry, thirsty for the blood of the wicked.

"Now," says Blalt in a constricted voice.

"I cannot hold back," moans Crorl. He is pushing ahead, but he is still aware of the outrage it is to interrupt a ritual, whatever its depravity.

"O, Caesar—" cries a Man.

"Hence," says Caesar, "wilt thou lift up Olympus?"

My eyes are locked on Caesar. I will be first to his naked throat.

"Great Caesar—" speaks another Man.

"Doth not Brutus bootless kneel?" answers Caesar.

I am so near. I am ready to leap. My eyes seem veiled—

"Speak, hands, for me!"

And Men, first one, then another, and then still more are striking at Caesar! We are astonished! It is a miracle, a moment of clarity, like the bright taste and smell of blood in a mouthful of filth. Caesar is down and the other Men are standing around him. "And you, Brutus?" says Caesar weakly. "Then fall, Caesar!" And he is dead!

"Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead! Run hence, proclaim, cry it about the river banks!" shouts a Man. We forget that it is part of the ritual, and we all turn. We are going back, back to our stones and the translator boxes. We are making ourselves comfortable again, speaking in awed and hushed tones, describing again to each other the magnificent moment we all witnessed. So many Men, all striking together, not one of them singly responsible for the leader's death but participating in a powerful racial cleansing. I am still breathless with the beauty and majesty of it. How close those Men had come to annihilation; now, though, they have proven their wholeness, their moral health, and their

brotherhood to us as intelligent people.

The red mist is vanishing from before my eyes. My breathing is slowing, my heartbeat is returning to normal. My tail is still, my claws are relaxing. The moaning and hissing is subsiding. Blalt and Crol seem as glad as I am.

"I saw no blood," complains Ubbra. "They stabbed him, they killed him, but there was no blood."

"You are a fool, Ubbra," says Blalt.

I am returning my attention to the front of the gathering place. Caesar's body has been removed — no public humiliation, no godless dismemberment. These Men share an affinity with us, one that I came to doubt during their long ritual. I know now that we must respect their rituals, although they are foreign, lengthier, more full of debate. Perhaps the Men have a peculiar kind of wisdom which we would do well to investigate. They will never know how near they came to spontaneous execution. We will not tell them, of course. We cannot. But we must bear the memory forever. There is some shame attached to it.

Antony is speaking. Is the ritual over? Is Antony speaking to us at last?

"Friends, Romans, burrow-mates, lend me your ears. I come to deposit eggs in Caesar's dead flesh, not to praise him. The evil that Men do lives after them—"

And so the ritual is continuing. But we are at peace, and we have found friendship and love with these strange beings. The taste of their blood must wait for another occasion.

*Russell Griffin, who has cautioned us in the past with the grim tales of Flo of Upper Blooton (July 1980) and Heedless Jack (Feb. 81) returns with another exemplary poem.*

## THE TRAGIC TALE OF MAD TOM, WHO MADE ONE TOO MANY FACES

Dear children, look (but do not stare)  
At that poor wretch who huddles there.  
Oh, see his eyes! And note how those  
Bright orbs turn inward to his nose.  
Each warp a volume that instructs—  
Those nostrils flared like aqueducts,  
Thoss lips pulled back like rubber bands.  
And mark you where that pigeon lands:  
Its rigid perch, now streaked with dung,  
Was once a pink and supple tongue.  
"Is he, Papa, a drunken sot?"  
Alas, my poppet, he is not.  
Though now he wishes but to die,  
He once was just as you or I.

Yes, he was like a thousand boys,  
With loving parents, Playskool toys,  
And blessed with each of nature's graces,  
Save one: he *would* go making faces.

Don't think his parents didn't care.  
"Take heed," they begged, "what you do there.  
Uncross your eyes and stop that, *please!*  
Lest that way they may someday freeze."  
They threatened and cajoled him, but he  
Stretched his face like Silly Putty.  
He pulled his lips till they grew slack,  
He folded both his eyelids back,  
And when the Postman rang the bell,  
He'd pop out with a frightful yell.  
He stuck his tongue out, bulged his eyes,  
Gave Cook the nastiest surprise!  
(She said it was a wicked sin—  
That gargoyle in the flour bin!)

One day he spied, with vile stealth,  
A maiden aunt, who (poor in health  
but rich in wrinkles, rings, and stocks)

Did not detect him in the flox.  
He watched her hobble up the stairs  
To visit her potential heirs,  
Then reached into his bag of tricks  
For his most gruesome facial tics.  
Just how he looked, one can't explain—  
A Martian run down by a train,  
A rubber duck turned inside out,  
A Bozo doll with nostril gout.  
Then up he popped and shouted, "Boo!  
Ha-ha, dear Aunt, did I scare you?"  
"Eep! Eep!" she shrieked, fell off the ledge,  
And backwards plunged into the hedge,  
Quite dead, but more unpleasant still,  
She'd not yet put them in her will.

"Quick, Tom," his doting parents cried,  
"Go get a pad and pen inside.  
Though Auntie's gone, her fingers might  
Retain some lingering power to write."  
But Tom moved not. He tried to draw  
His tumid tongue back in his jaw,  
But it was *stuck*! So, too, his lips  
Stayed stretched *without* his fingertips,  
Nor could he now uncross his eyes,  
Or close his mouth to keep out flies.

It ended as you might expect:  
Their lives and fortunes were quite wrecked.  
They lost their home. His father's firm  
Went bankrupt, and he served a term  
For forgery, and died in jail.  
His mother, ruined, weak, and frail,  
Eked out a living on the stage,  
And died, disgraced, in middle age.  
Tom's Welfare claims were disallowed,  
And he was hounded by a crowd.  
Awhile he bore their jeers and rocks  
With part-time jobs at stopping clocks,  
Until, derided, shunned, and kicked,  
He turned into yon derelict. .  
So learn from this sad man's disgrace  
The fate of those who make a face.

—RUSSELL M. GRIFFIN



*As our long-time readers know, the founding editors of F&SF were two California writers and editors, Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas. They edited the magazine for the first half-dozen years and set a course and tone that still exist to this day. The excerpt below is from a new book titled THE EUREKA YEARS (Bantam), edited by McComas's wife Annette. It is partly a collection of stories from 1949-54. Beyond that, Mrs. McComas has researched the magazine's collection of correspondence (held at the Syracuse University Library) and included a healthy number of letters from the editors that form a fascinating picture of the early years of F&SF. Here is a small sample.*

## Sorry, But— Rejections and Advice

BY

**ANTHONY BOUCHER and  
J. FRANCIS MCCOMAS**  
EDITED BY ANNETTE MCCOMAS

One descriptive phrase has kept recurring as associates and personal friends have described Boucher and McComas—they were, many people said, first and foremost, men of good will. An example was their effort in the beginning to answer all manuscript submissions, good or bad, with personal letters. Both remembered the frustration and despair of receiving formal rejection slips themselves. When, rather swiftly, they began to handle around 250 manuscripts a month, they found it humanly impossible to live up to their desire to treat all writers and would-be writers with dignity. They had finally to move to the "Sorry but—" slips followed by a few words for the near-misses, and the formal rejection slip for the impossibles. There were many notable exceptions—any manuscript submitted by a prisoner in any location received personal attention and a letter as encouraging as possible. Again, the Very Young, the ten-to-twenty set, got personal notes from the editors.

The few examples chosen for this small cross section displays a wide variety—from the most sophisticated to the most naive. It certainly dis-

plays some of their humor and their sympathy.

The advice, included here, remains exactly appropriate for today's young writers, and I hope they will take note of the "Dutch Uncle" clarity about what's wrong as well as the sensitive encouragement of what's right.

14 December 1949

Dear Mr. Kowkanski:

The trouble is you're trying too hard. You're too intent on showing off. If you like Latin tags, try *ars est celare artem*—which not only indicates that good writing should not be obtrusive and self-conscious, but also conveys in its first four letters precisely where fancy sesquipedalianism gives the reader a pain.

Forget all about influences and imitations. Forget all the big words you know (and more often, to judge from some of their inept intrusions, don't know). Try telling a story in the English or American language. If you're over 25, this advice probably comes too late; but it's more likely that you're simply going through a phase that often attacks young writers—in which case it's time someone told you bluntly that you're driving up a blind alley.

Further advice: Don't write long introductory letters to editors. It stamps you as an amateur, wastes the editor's time, and cannot possibly affect his decision, which is based solely on the story. And never *never* NEVER send out a MS without enclosing return postage; most editors will simply dump it in the waste basket and God knows why we're more kind-hearted.

We'd be very happy to hear from you again if you ever decide to write like Joe Kowkanski of New Jersey.

Sincerely yours,  
A.B.

The editors claimed to have invented the rejection slip with only the words "Sorry, but—" at the beginning. This form provided space for a brief personal note (not always sunny as seen below). Later they added the full formal rejection slip for the utterly hopeless manuscripts, referred to usually as the "slush" (almost always unsolicited and unagented).

\* \* \*

Dear Mr. Gorham.

Sorry, but if this magazine has a tabu—it's one *violently* against stories wherein protagonist is dead all the time and doesn't know it! We get about 5 such a week.

12 October 1950

Dear Mr. Arnold:

This is going to be a very lay-it-on-the-line Dutch uncle letter:

AJAX FROM THE ALLEY was, I think, the first Benedict we saw. It struck us as having a good idea, for all its flaws, and probably worth discussing later for rewrite possibilities.

In the year since then we've read God knows how many Benedicts—you're probably the most prolific contributor we have. And as a result of this intensive study of Benedict, we're certain that it's no use talking about a rewrite on AJAX.

You're exceedingly fertile in story-ideas. Many of them are trite and weak; occasionally one is definitely good.

But whether the idea's good or bad, the execution is always at best mediocre. You're turning 'em out so hot and heavy that you don't seem to bother to learn the crudest rudiments of the craft of writing—plot structure, story development, characterization, prose style. And in a year you've shown no growth or improvement.

There aren't any books or courses that'll teach you how to write; but we'd suggest you try some careful analysis of printed stories that you like, figuring out what makes them come off and how they're treated. Then go over your own stuff analytically and observe where and how it differs. Then try thinking about a story and working on it instead of shooting it off fast and whamming into another idea.

Good luck!

A.B.

15 July 1950

Eugene Clement d'Art: THE MAD SCULPTOR

Sorry, but—

much though we admire Poe, we can't think of a worse model for a modern

writer—to get away with his type of heavy elaborate overstatement you have, by God, to *be* Poe.

*The Editors*

I like the way this letter enumerates so clearly to the writer the exact kinds of ideas and treatments sought for the magazine.

12 January 1950

Dear Mr. Cowen:

TRAP ON CYBELE is a highly readable story, which should certainly sell somewhere; but it isn't our meat. Strip it of its interplanetary trappings, and it's simply a trite, routine cops-&-robbers story.

We want something fresher, a little different. A new scientific idea, a new plot-twist, a new imaginative concept—anything that isn't simple hack. As a sample of the highly varied kinds of science fiction that appeal to us, see Ted Sturgeon's HURKLE in our first issue or Kris Neville's EVERY WORK INTO JUDGMENT in our second—or see almost any of the stories in such anthologies as the Bleiler-Dikty BEST SCIENCE FICTION 1949 or Judith Merrill's Bantambook SHOT IN THE DARK—to say nothing of my coeditor's ADVENTURES IN TIME & SPACE.

We hope we shall hear from you again with something more distinctive—and possibly including your self-echoing little green men, whom we like.

Sincerely,  
A.B.

2 July 1954

Norm Alterer: MR. EMLER'S LUCK

*Sorry, but—*

I rather like this—very neat and logical. But I'm so terribly tired of pact-with-the-Devil stories that they have to be not merely good but verging on wonderful.

Regretfully,  
*The Editors*

This straightforward letter to a Very New writer not only spells out the fundamentals but says something very significant about those whom the young writer refers to as "hacks."

17 November 1949

Dear Mr. Lowert:

First a word of warning: 95% of all editors in the business would simply have returned your MS unread, because it was in handwriting. Or rather they wouldn't even have returned it, since no postage was enclosed, but just dumped it in the wastebasket.

If you can't afford to buy a typewriter, then beg, borrow or steal one. Or pay to have your story typed by a professional. Submitting handwritten MSS is a pure waste of time. And ALWAYS enclose return postage, and put your name and address on the story as well as on the cover-letter.

AL'S REVENGE certainly isn't publishable (how many first stories are?): but it's a little hard to say whether or not it shows promise. The idea of a corpse returning after the cement treatment is good and I think new; but the writing, I'm sure you won't be surprised to learn, is very amateurish. The structure's awkward, your characters are just names without personalities, the prose has no individuality.

The hacks that you speak of so scornfully (and incidentally, they do not make "comfortable livings") may have little real literary talent, but they do have experience and technique. The only way to get those qualities is by reading a great deal in the fields that interest you, reading critically and trying to observe just how things are put together, how effects are attained; and by writing a great deal, to the point where you begin to see what's wrong with your earlier stuff and how to improve it.

As I say, it's hard to tell from this very fumbling first effort whether you should continue. But if you do decide to, we'd be happy to see how you're coming along—say about 20 stories from now.

Sincerely yours,  
*The Editors*

This reply separates personal preference from commercial possibilities beyond a doubt.

Dear Mr. Payne:

Since I, too, am a devoted admirer of the creator of Mssrs. Pickwick and Weller, I'm going to forsake the usual 'alleybis' of editors and tell you quite frankly why we cannot use *A FRIEND PASSES BY*.

While Mr. Boucher and I both found the story wholly charming, we are both in reluctant agreement that it is too sentimental and old-fashioned for our readers. An editor must gauge as accurately as possible the desires of the majority of his readers (or he soon ceases to be an editor!); thus, it happens too often that an editor realizes a story he likes would elicit nothing but an angry clamor from most of his readers. Such is the present case and both of us regret it.

May I express my appreciation for a very pleasant half-hour's reading?

Yours very truly,  
J. Francis McComas

I don't know whatever came of the advice that follows. She had plenty to work on!

1 August 1952

Dear Miss Naylor:

First of all, let me be brutally blunt to say that very few editors would bother to read a MS as amateurishly submitted as yours. For your future guidance:

Use *black* typewriter ribbon;

Use 8½x11 paper;

For emphasis, use *italics* (indicated in typing by underlining), not CAP-ITALS. (For that matter, use less emphasis.)

But I'm glad we are editors who are apt to read anything. We don't see possibilities in *FOR EVERY NEED*; but *THE ROBOT THAT SOLD LIES*, awkward though it is, is appealing.

We'd like to see you try a rewrite on this. Since we know nothing about your potential as a writer, we can't make any guarantee on this; it has to be purely speculative.

But we would enjoy seeing a revision along these lines:

A) Pull its length down a little—closer to 1000 words than its present 1300;

- B) Cut a good deal of your reiterated exposition, and in its place put in more of the robot's nonsense-logic thoughts, which are fun;
- C) Give your Man-Who-Did-Things a name; this allegorical type of label is irritating;
- D) Your last page should be a good deal subtler. The theme is good, but it shouldn't be so bluntly stated;
- E) We'd like to retile it THE LITTLEST ROBOT. Hope you'll feel like trying this. And if you do, please tell us a little about yourself.

A.B.

I was particularly intrigued with this letter; the word-choice is so apt. It is, I think, a splendid critical analysis.

16 May 1950

Dear Mr. W . . . . .

If nothing else, politeness limits an editor's criticism of a writer's work. Mere practicality, limitations of time and energy determine just how far an editor should go in criticizing and suggesting revisions of a manuscript. Once in a great while, a badly written story with an inherently great idea forces an editor to forget all those considerations and spew forth an angry, detailed, brutal comment on an author's work.

Such is the case with MR. BURNS.

It is a truly wonderful piece of terror which you have executed probably as badly as possible. I do not mean that you are a bad writer, *per se*. I do mean that you don't think your ideas through, that your construction is careless, even slipshod, that your plotline is faulty; in brief, you never realize more than the barest minimum of your story idea's potential.

Let us look at what is wrong with MR. BURNS. In the first place, that long cutback beginning with p.3 is structurally an abomination. Your reader loses all the nice feeling he has had developed within him by your first 2 pages, he forgets the thread of the story, and he winds up by still trying to reorient himself while you're busily writing your climax—which, of course, has no effect on the reader whatsoever.

Secondly, you do not give a "why" for this happening ... the laws of fantasy justice demand that there be some reason for an executed person having the right (which, in turn, gives him the *ability*) to return for vengeance on the executioner who is, after all, merely an instrument of the law.

Thirdly, you have jammed into a couple of paragraphs that awfulness of Johnny's being the hangman's son. That should be hinted at from the very beginning, built carefully so that its final revelation is logically arrived at. Then, the impact will be at its fullest power....

I trust you will pardon my violent tone. But I do hate to see a writer refuse to think through his ideas. Further, I hope you'll work over MR. BURNS ... and let us see another version. Finally, I hope you'll let your next idea stew in your mind for at least 2 weeks before you begin to write it.

Sincerely,

*J. Francis McComas*

Finally, the almost-took-it letter, but painstakingly phrased to encourage and stimulate the writer.

29 July 1952

Dear Mr. Franciscus:

If it's any consolation to you in lieu of a check, TOP SECRET caused a great deal of editorial argument and necessitated several readings.

Final verdict: It's a damned good story, completely salable ... and not to us. It's just a smidgin too routine, unsubtle, conventional, formula, or whatever the proper word is.

We do want space travel melodrama ... with a little more novelty, a little more of the "quality" emphasis on character rather than the "pulp" stress on pure plot and action. (You'll understand I'm using "quality" and "pulp" as descriptive definitions, with no snobbish intent.)

We'd like very much to see more from you, but suggest that you study the magazine somewhat first. If you haven't seen it and find it hard to get in Phoenix, let us know and we'll be glad to send you a few sample back issues.

With your next submissions (soon, I hope), you might let us know a little about yourself, especially as a writer.

We're positive TOP SECRET will sell elsewhere, and very fast. Might we suggest a title change? T S is the title of a David Grinnell story published by us and very recently anthologized by Groff Conklin.

Cordially,  
*The Editors*



The editors deal with the very young.

13 February 1953

Robert N. Rolfe: The Death Condemned

Certainly, your writing shows a lot of promise but—look! even your English teacher should know this isn't a *story*. It has no development, no story line; at best, it would be an anecdote, a tiny case history in a *book* about the era you project. Compare this *objectively* to the *stories* Bradbury has written on the same lines. After some study, I think you'll realize the vast difference—technically—between his work and yours.

It's damn' nice to see a 16 yr old thinking as you do. I hope you'll couple that thinking with some sound technique!

Cordially,  
The Editors

27 August 1954

Dear Mrs. Sacklow:

Sounds like your bright 17-yr-old is writing without sufficient background reading, so that he's unfortunately duplicating old stuff. The eye-transplant is so very stale I'm 99% sure I wdn't like it even if it were brilliantly done; and the Last Adam'theme figures in an awful large percentage of our regular daily rejects. But if he comes up with something brighter, you might try us; we've bought from authors that young, and some of the current Top Names in s f started even younger.

Sincerely,  
Anthony Boucher

26 May 1954

Dear Mr. Billet:

B-B-BRAIN isn't for us—not enough development of a concept as old as Capek's R U R; but it's interesting enough to make me take time out to answer your letter.

It's impossible to speak with any certainty, especially on the basis of a single short-story; but I'll make the rash guess that you may "have possibil-

ities as a writer." Chief reason is that you don't, thank God, sound like anybody else; there's an offbeat individuality that's refreshing as an editor wades through MSS. And you've got the good sense not to pad your wordage and not to fall into solid long passages of heavy exposition.

To be completely frank, you don't seem at the moment to be much more than "surprisingly-good-for-15"; but a number of writers, particularly in the science-fantasy field, have begun selling commercially at 16 or 17, and quite possibly another year or so of practice may get you started. God knows....

As to what you do wrong:

Please, please work very hard on your spelling. I know that a great many professional writers spell badly, but not so badly as, for instance, *tung*.

And ALWAYS enclose a stamped addressed return envelope.

Good luck.

Sincerely,  
*Anthony Boucher*

16 January 1950

Dear Mr. J.: Many thanks for your note and permission of 1/14. Don't let your youth scare you. Getting started at an early age is almost a tradition in the modern fantasy field. Ray Bradbury, August Derleth, Isaac Asimov, Theodore Sturgeon—see what company you're in? Good luck.

Sincerely,  
*The Editors*



*Here is an unusual tale about a Denver shoe salesman who inherits an old Cornish estate and tries to change it into something it does not want to be. B. L. Keller contributed two fine stories to F&SF in the early 70's; she lives in California and says that while she is fond of her garden, she is not excessively devoted to it...*

# Flora

BY

B. L. KELLER

**T**he trees flanking the road leaned slightly forward, like spectators at a sacrifice, branches grappling overhead in a dense thatch.

Frazier saw graylight ahead, ruined lawns, uncouth granite satyrs, and the house, lowering, towering, monumental. Only then did he realize that the road through which they'd driven was his own driveway.

Easing from behind the steering wheel, Mobley threw car keys at the man who stood before the dwelling. "Hemmings, is it? Mr. Frazier's bags are in the boot."

Frazier got out of the car slowly.

"Your predecessor, the former heir, made enormous strides toward reclaiming the place," Mobley told him. "By his ... demise ... the greensward was like velvet, trees in fanciful topiary; beyond, the park and then the wood. Your wood."

"It's swallowing my park," Frazier said.

"It has that tendency." Hemmings lifted a foot to shut the car trunk. "But you will become part of it, and Miss Rowan will rest, knowing the family remains."

"Family," Frazier snorted. "Some sixth cousin I'd never heard of."

"But blood." Luggage laden, Hemmings staggered toward the house.

"Blood! If she was so blood-minded, why didn't she make a will instead of leaving me to be tracked by a free-lance heirhunter?"

Hemmings neither paused nor turned. "Her passing was quite unexpected."

"She was a hundred, wasn't she?" Frazier demanded.

"Something over that." Kicking open the great carved door, Hemmings stood aside.

© 1982 by B.L. Keller

The paneled walls of the foyer were scored, as if by claws. Over a deeply gouged table hung a mirror in heavy gold frame, slubbed with yellow droppings. Frazier watched Hemmings toil up the curved stairway. Then: "What are those?"

Mobley examined the brute, mud-daubed constructions wedged between the balusters. "Nests."

"Dear God. Did he keep eagles?"

"The former heir? Hardly. He was appalled by the conditions here. Sacked the caretaker, hired armies of charpersons. Hemmings returned after the tragedy, but you can't expect one man to keep up the place."

"He could keep harpies from nesting on the stairs."

"I wouldn't be too sharp with him. You won't find it that easy to get help here."

Curiosity, the dark excitement of inheriting a stranger's leavings, dwindled under a mounting apprehension. "You can't get help around here?"

"Around here, yes. This part of Cornwall is chronically depressed. But here? Your predecessor found no one but Hemmings who lasted a fortnight." Ushering Edwin down a wide corridor, Mobley said, "I rather resent that 'free-lance heirhunter' bit. You seem to forget that you were not Veronica Rowan's immediate heir. He, I must say, was entirely grateful to be informed by me of an unexpected inheritance."

The study was large, handsomely proportioned. Stepping with ponder-

ous grace around the massive, furrowed desk, Mobley drew dust-frosted draperies back from leaded panes, then lowered himself into a carved chair. "Do you ever have house dreams?"

"House...."

"Dreams about houses. I have one which ... recurs. Knowing nothing of the previous occupants, I come with my loved ones to an enormous ancient dwelling."

"You have a family?"

"Only in the dream. We discover rooms, whole wings, where there seemed to be nothing, as if the house grows. The upstairs corridors, angled so we can't see both ends at once, are lined with decaying bedchambers; each of us claims, reclaims, one. In the closets we find rotting velvet garments, toys, the raspings of long-dead strangers. We use what rooms we must, close off the most unsound. Then we try to rehabit one more, and the horror begins."

Hemings appeared with a heavy tray and set out tea.

"Unlock the library," the solicitor told him. "Mr. Frazier wants it unlocked."

Hemmings left.

Breaking open a scone, Frazier examined its interior and placed it carefully on his plate. "What would the place bring?"

"You only arrive and you want to sell?"

"It's not what I expected."

"Few things are."

"It was appraised...."

"Appraisal is one thing, disposal quite another. It's not all that easy."

"Easy!" An intemperate warmth flooded Frazier's countenance. "You snoop through death notices, send a few registered letters, claim a third of everything."

"Entirely legal. Entirely proper."

"But your share was the disposable assets."

"My dear boy, you can hardly expect me to accept barter. And may I remind you that it was I who found your predecessor dangling in the conservatory. Cut him down myself. Easy, you say!"

"All right. What could I get for the place?"

"A great gloomy Cornwall estate, few amenities, dubious condition. Taxes and upkeep would dissuade a raving recluse from accepting it gratis. In your position, I should refurbish enough to be cozy, then attempt to revel in the pace, the place, the peace. Hemmings will work for next to nothing. Your taxes are current, your woods teeming with flora and fauna." He hesitated, then heaved himself from the chair. "Come."

As they walked down the corridor, Frazier lagged. "What is that smell?"

"Your library." Mobley opened a door on their right.

The odors merged in a shifting, fulsome melange — damp loam, excrement, puerperal blossoms, the musky reek of blood and semen.

As the solicitor opened the window, unmoored cobwebs, tattered by the raw breeze, billowed from corners. Through the branches of a gibbous tree outside the window, cold light filtered in to illuminate shelves, bookstands, tables, teeming with manuscripts.

Mobley settled into a Morris chair. "I never saw Veronica Rowan, you know. Nor this place, before I located her first heir. When I brought him here, the stink of this room was so overwhelming we sent to the village for sprays, bayberry, even cologne. Finally, we entered. I opened a volume. He unrolled a scroll."

Cupping both hands over his muzzle, the solicitor inhaled deeply. "When we could speak, he whimpered, 'Burn ... burn the lot.' I cited anthropological, pathological, demonological significance. I offered to ... relocate all these." He waved a palsied, cherubic hand at the documents. "The man refused to discuss it. For a time, he kept in touch — he had plans for developing the property. Then he stopped writing, had me turned away from the door. Finally I came down prepared to force my way in, but by then he was quite alone. The house was a shambles, teeming with foliage, an absolute herbarium, and him hanging, apparently for days. Imagine — a vine. He must have trained it, fashioned it somehow."

Disquieted, Frazier opened a volume. "Oh, my God."

Mobley guided him to a settee. "I

have studied rites of Ashtoreth, orgies of the sea elephant, Iroquois tortures, Krafft-Ebing, but I had never suspected...."

"They must be destroyed," Frazier rasped.

The solicitor's face was damp, waxy. "They exist, therefore they exist. What we have seen renders morality ludicrous, but, as a student of the heteroclitic, I beg you, for the sake of your putative soul, get rid of them."

"How? The law...."

"What state would prosecute what it dares not contemplate? The disclosure of their existence would repudiate civilization; indeed, sanity. Your only immediate danger would be an aroused peasantry armed with torch and rood." The solicitor pressed plethoric thighs together without stilling them. "I would be willing to give you a bit of cash for them, if only to keep them from the gaze of the uninitiated."

"Cash?"

"Oh, say twelve thousand pounds."

Rising unsteadily, Frazier found a bellpull, which came away in his hand.

They found Hemmings wiping down a long, darkly stained chopping block in a kitchen which resembled a charnel house maintained by an atrocious but slovenly regime. "I'm going back to London for a few days," Frazier told him. "I want this place cleaned, fit to live in. Hire whatever help you need. I'll pick up wine and a few things from a deli. You get a supply of regular food in. Where's the icebox?"

"Food storage has never been a problem," Hemmings said.

"I want those rat droppings out of the sink, traps set. I want the nests gone, all of them."

The caretaker's gaze was unfathomable. "You don't give sanctuary?"

"I don't plan to live in any goddamn aviary. *What kind of woman was Veronica Rowan?*"

Hemmings shrugged. "She had her ways."

On the drive to London, a warm and lively dialogue flowed between Frazier and Mobley.

"Twenty thousand! No more." The solicitor's corpulent face was flushed, knuckles white as he gripped the wheel.

"They should be appraised."

"My dear young man, those documents are enough to get you expelled from Britain, banned from your native land. We live in a riotously permissive time, but there are taboos transcending time and place. The unspeakable is one thing, the unthinkable quite another. Twenty-five."

"Where would I get a car like this?"

"You can't afford it."

"You manage."

"I'm a working man."

"It could be a kind of option. Who's your tailor?"

...Frazier dined alone at his hotel, a decent-looking man wearing polyester blends from the Denver store in which he had managed the shoe department.

He took a proper interest in baseball, sex, the currently acceptable beers. And here he was, solitary, alien.

Retiring to his room, he telephoned Ardel Williams. Ardel had worked a year at Bloomingdale's, spoke intimately of Baja California, and was the most exciting woman in Colorado.

"Hi. Here I am in London."

"Who's this?"

"Edwin. Edwin Frazier."

"I'm expecting another call, Edwin."

"I wondered if I could send you a ticket to London, pick you up in my Maserati, pop down to my Cornwall estate."

"There is a physical estate? You've seen it?"

"Today. Few thousand acres, manor house, old family retainer, that sort of thing."

A pause, then a new vibrance. "I don't know how I could get away before June."

"I'll cover any salary you lose."

"Edwin, you're mad!"

Edwin tossed the keys at Hemmings. "Miss Williams' luggage is in the boot, along with wine and the like. We'll take sherry before dinner."

"My God." Ardel gazed at the house. "*Masterpiece Theatre*."

Seated in a throne-like chair, her face illumed by myriad candle flames, Ardel was rhapsodic. "I love it. Love it. So much could be done with it."

"Where would you start?"

"Plumbing, electricity, central heat. A proper cook, staff. What are those great twiggy things over the windows?"

Pale, he rose. "Nests. Goddamn that Hemmings."

"Edwin, don't make a scene. The man is so...."

He hesitated. "Sinister?"

"No. No. Authentic. So *authentic*. It's unnerving. Try to relax. Think of us together here, where the game hens come from."

After dinner, they explored the second floor. "*Camelot*," Ardel breathed. "A whole lifestyle that doesn't exist any more. Capri and Cannes were ruined years ago. The Caribbean is full of nationalists. And they say even Brando is sick of Tahiti." She set her candelabrum on a deeply scarred table. "I feel like the orphan virgin in the castle of the sardonic Marquis."

He smiled in a funny lopsided way he had cultivated. "Only sardonic?"

Afterwards, in the soft-lapping light of the dwindled candles, she harvested the hairpins strewn across the pillow and dropped them in her wiglet. "Hear the leaves rustling outside?"

"Flora of the night."

"Edwin! Don't be macabre again."

In the morning they drove half an hour to the village. Strolling cobbled streets, Ardel held Edwin's arm tight. "You know what I thought when you met me at the airport? I thought, 'My God, he was born to wear tweeds.'"

She matched his step, thigh pressing his. "All the village girls are ogling you. We must find your coat of arms. After that, we can start putting the place into shape."

It was not all heraldry, wistful glances from bucolic virgins. There was the staff. Maids complained of inexplicable chills. Cooks developed weeping fits. Gardeners left without notice after turning the compost heap.

Ardel insisted on seeing what was behind the library door, her curiosity inflamed by Edwin's resistance. For a day after she emerged from the room, she would not look at him. He told her of Mobley's offers, and she recovered, changed not essentially, but in subtle ways.

"Estimates, contractors, duns. The place is eating me alive." Edwin tapped his breastbone. "I feel a pressure under here all the time."

Ardel examined her newly painted toenails. "If you can't handle it, I suppose you could always go back to shoes."

"I could take Mobley's last offer."

"So long as he keeps raising it, it's not his last offer. I think you need a vacation."

He was alarmed. "Not alone."

"No, no." She handed him a travel folder.

"Irish Rent-a-Hut," he read without interest.

"We could be there in no time."

"And do what?"

"Edwin, Club Mediterranee' made millions advertising nothing to do."

"We leave a genuine Cornish estate for some boggy backwater that offers nothing to do?"

She was silent so long he was afraid she was offended. Then she said slowly, "Edwin, you may have hit on something."

That night, caressing him with exquisite knowledge, she whispered, "How many acres do you have here?"

The sketches done, prospectus typed, Edwin telephoned Mobley. "We've come to a decision."

The solicitor's voice was charged with suppressed emotion. "Shall I bring a lorry, then?"

When he arrived, they let him spend an hour in the library alone. Then they insisted he dine with them.

As Ardel refilled his glass, she said, "Now we have something special to show you."

He examined the sketches, glanced through the prospectus. "Audacious."

"In the beginning, we envision a hundred cottages, authentic, redolent of old world charm, but with every convenience. Have you ever seen Carmel-by-the-Sea?"

The solicitor was impassive. "You propose razing the wood."

"It's my wood," Edwin said.

"That kind of wanton destruction goes against the grain."

"So far as I have been able to ascertain, Mobley, you have no grain."



"We're leaving a stand of trees for the Robin Hood Hollow," Ardel interrupted hastily. "Ginger beer, Maid Marians in stretch tights and jerkins, Little Johns. We're working out the logistics of authentic-looking sanitary facilities."

Mobley raised a soft, jeweled hand. "Nevertheless. You're talking about an enormous capital investment."

Edwin's voice was strained. "It's my only chance to hang on to the place."

"How contemporary. We must rape it in order to save it."

"We are considering," Ardel murmured, "offering the contents of the library to certain discreetly selected and strong minded ... aesthetes."

It was dawn when, tie discarded, pale fleshy jowls dark stubbled, Mobley growled, "Settled, then. You have, through no wit, merit or achievement on your part, forced me...."

"Come off it." Edwin stretched. "You have only to manage the financing."

"... to put together a consortium, wrest staggering sums for the unhal- lowed purpose of turning part of my native land into a tourist crib."

"In exchange for which...."

Mobley stood. "If we are to proceed with your Cornwall Village Vacations, you will never again speak of what was in that library."

There were conferences in Abu Dhabi, Athens, Rome, meetings with emirs, premiers, bankers, with name-

less men bearing large sums of cash.

Edwin and Ardel returned to the estate and the familiar litany of servants' woes.

The problem with Hemmings came up later, when the surveyors arrived. He accosted Edwin in the park: "What are those men doing?"

"Surveying the property."

"Why?"

"We're going to develop it, if that's any of your business."

"Send them away. You may not desecrate this land."

Edwin flushed, stung by the man's impertinence. "I do what I want with what belongs to me."

"Belongs to you? Ignorant man. Ignorant man."

Real anger galvanized Edwin. "Out of my way or off my grounds."

The caretaker stood rooted. "If I thought any good would come of it.... But you being the last of her blood, and the world going the way it is, I see nothing better to succeed you."

Stepping around him, Edwin strode to the house, resisting the urge to run. He entered his room, trembling. "Hemmings. Hemmings has got to go."

"Are you crazy? The upstairs maid has the twitches, we've not had a gardener for weeks, and cook quit this morning."

"I will not tolerate Hemmings."

"You can tolerate him for now, Edwin, or tolerate my having a shrieking breakdown."

The next morning, the caretaker

brought up coffee and croissants himself. On the tray was a bit of greenery in a honey pot.

Ardel set the jar on a bedside table.

"Oh, come on," Edwin protested.

The plantlet was pitifully frail, gracile stems barely supporting minute translucent leaves.

"He's trying to make amends, Edwin. He's even set it in potting soil. It never hurts to be gracious."

As he reached for the cream, his hand grazed a leaf. "Interesting." He touched the foliage again. "Look. It's a sensitive plant, like a mimosa."

Ardel watched. "No, no. A sensitive plant *withdraws* from touch."

Work proceeded on Cornwall Village Vacations with only normal catastrophes — underground water, union disputes, delivery delays.

"Thank God for a few simple things." Edwin stroked the plant, smiling as a tendril stirred against his palm. "Damn. I wonder what you are."

When they were next in London, he bought Ardel an exquisitely illustrated botany text. Returning to the estate, he pored over the book. "Nothing in here that even resembles it. We may have something totally unique."

"For God's sake, don't tell anybody. It would be our luck to have the thing declared an endangered species, get ourselves overrun by botanists, ripped off for a nature preserve."

On the next trip, Ardel and Mobley worked out the more tedious financial details while Edwin took time to shop.

"You dog — leaving us to deal with all the miserable haggling." Sitting on the bed, Ardel kicked off her shoes. "Let's see if you've made proper amends." While Edwin examined the plant for aphids, she unwrapped the parcels. "Rooting hormones. Plant light. Moisture meter. Horticultural vitamins." She stood. "It doesn't need feeding. You've not been looking closely."

Gently separating the pliant stems, he glimpsed a tender furling of creamy, canescent petals, tipped with a coral blush.

"It's blossoming!" he breathed.

"It is also digesting a fly."

**B**ecoming a tycoon had its costs. After struggling with Rockefellers, account executives, jet travel, Edwin hungered for simple pleasures.

"Will you stop fussing over that shrub ... vine, whatever it is," Ardel snapped. "You're getting humus in my hairpiece."

Viciously, he swept her tresses off the table. "Everywhere I look, your damn scalps are sprawled or coiled or whelping pins."

"It happens to be a virgin Caucasian fall."

He went to bed early, leaving her in the study with financial reports.

The tentative, infinitely gentle touch did not wake him, only quickened his flesh. Shivering, he stirred, murmured in his sleep.

"Edwin? Are you all right?" Entering the room, Ardel switched on the light. "Edwin, you've got your hand all tangled in the plant!"

At breakfast, she said, "It should be put in the conservatory."

"No."

"It sprawls."

He repotted it himself, lissome tendrils clinging to his fingers. As he lifted the soft, heavy rootball in both hands, a dark sense of richness, mastery, suffused his loins.

"Edwin, you've scattered potting soil all over the rug. Look, we need a final okay on these specs. I promised Ian we'd run up to London."

"You go."

"I don't want to drive back alone after midnight."

"Stay at a hotel."

After a late supper, a few drinks, he retired to his room, fed the plant, and fell asleep worrying vaguely about root shock.

The first caress lingered over his lips, strayed down his throat, his chest. He moaned, stifled a sob; then, groping among the pulsating foliage, he found the softness of the yielding blossom.

It was noon when Ardel came to his room. "My God, Edwin, you look wasted. That plant must be absorbing your oxygen."

Her white, unflawed skin seemed to him epiphytotic, her body a construct of thick, unyielding bone and muscle. "Out!"

She withdrew with great dignity.

Dressed, he left the house, crossed the new saniturf, the concrete parking lots, and plunged into the wood.

It was a holiday, bulldozers silent, work crews gone. All around him was a stillness broken only by the soft explosions of tumescent toadstools. Surrounded by deep-fissured bark of ancient trees, their foliage luminescent in the dim, he wandered.

The clearing was sudden, unexpected, the ground convex as the belly of a vast reclining houri, rich, bare of growth. In the center, a dozen tall stones stood like judges around a long horizontal slab. Shallow ditches hewn along its sides joined at the end to form a basin.

Around these stones were set others, smaller, in concentric rings. The carving on the inner rings was unfamiliar to him, but as he examined the outer stones, the lineation became more intelligible, until ... *Veronica Rowan*, and next, last, the name of his predecessor. The warmth that rose from that earth could not be explained by the meager sunlight. He fled before he might understand.

Half-dazed, he returned to the house.

As he entered his room, he heard the clash of steel, saw the carnage. "*Bitch!*" Hurling himself at Ardel, he struck the pruning shears from her hand.

She faced him, outraged, unflinching. "I was only going to trim it, and

then I ... saw." Her voice was vibrant with loathing. "*You plant lover.*"

As he gripped her throat, squeezing shut the great vessels, he was seized from behind, thrown to the floor, the caretaker's knee planted firmly in his groin.

Struggling to her feet, Ardel said hoarsely, "You needn't get up, Edwin. I will send for my things."

When she was gone, Hemmings released Edwin and strode past the servants clustered in the doorway.

Edwin shut the door. As he kissed the wounds, quivering tendrils crept under his ascot, his silk shirt, and he groaned, giving himself up to the inexpressible, the unspeakable.

Later, as he lay fondling her pistil, he heard a knock.

Hemmings entered with a tea tray. "Your display cost you the last of your servants. They left with your lady. Shall I root the cuttings?"

All in all, the man was no more difficult than any other help, and his devotion to the place was beyond question.

Flora recovered, enveloped the bedposts, invaded the hall. Her blossoms burst forth in riotous display, glistening with his gift. Often he woke dazed, entrapped in her stems, blanketed with lambent petals, dusted with a golden pollen.

October found work crews long departed, cottages unfinished, collectors turned away by the caretaker. Now and then, feeling a need for dry, un-

scented air, Edwin left his chamber, looked at the letters, bills, telegrams piled in the foyer, and told himself he must deal with things. Then he returned, heavy with desire, to flora.

There are problems in any relationship. Tendrils invaded electric outlets. Roots clogged the pipes. Twining stems disrupted telephone connections. Through smashed panes, flora reached out to autumn rains — and other life moved in.

"Holes. Moles. Voles." Edwin raised a haggard face to the caretaker. "Things are nosing up through my saniturf. At night I hear bloody clashes and today ... today I found flora wound around the carcass of a full-grown rat."

Sometimes Edwin woke immobilized by myriad strands, forced to free himself with painstaking tenderness, thrilled, terrified, by her inordinate attachment.

One morning, venturing into the green, embowered hall, he fell, clawing at the fibrous stalk around his ankle.

As he scuttled backward into his room, he heard the spray of gravel outside the house, car doors closing, Hemmings' voice: "Mr. Frazier is not receiving."

"He will damn well receive us. Come on, Ian."

Edwin hobbled to a chair.

He heard Mobley's voice on the stairway. "What is growing up there?" Footsteps. Muttering. "Worse than the other time. A jungle."

Scented, immaculate, Ardel burst into the room. "Edwin! We half expected to find you dead!"

Behind her, Mobley. "Good God, man! Look at this room."

"We have to get him out of here," Ardel told Mobley.

"I will never leave," Edwin said.

The solicitor eyed him appraisingly, then turned to Hemmings. "Let me see how the rest of this swill pit has degenerated."

Alone with Edwin, Ardel knelt. "Do you trust me?"

"No."

"Good. You're still in touch with reality. They're not going to let Cornwall Village Vacations fall apart. There's big money involved — Arab money, New Jersey money. Any obstacle will be removed."

He gave his attention to the pain in his ankle.

"All right. If they get rid of you, who will take care of your plants?"

He could not help but smile.

Mobley called, and she left.

Edwin listened to the rustling of foliage in the hall, a desperate rush of tiny feet, the reedy scream of something in *extremis*.

In bed one morning, ravished, spent, he heard a motor, then Ardel. "Is he upstairs?"

And Hemmings. "He does not want to see you."

Her voice was hard. "Get him dressed and down the back stairs."

A second motor. Hemmings' voice.

"Who are those men?"

"Never mind. If you don't bring him to the back door, things may get very rough and very ugly." A pause, then: "Good morning. Come in."

Edwin was struggling into trousers when Hemmings entered the room. "How many?"

"Two gentlemen, two brutes."

Edwin was wary. "You're not going to deliver me."

"No."

"Would you lift a hand to defend me?"

"Against five people?" Brushing aside the swaying leaves, Hemmings preceded Edwin to the front staircase.

Edwin crept halfway down. Voices in the drawing room.

"We can proceed in a few minutes." Ardel's voice was strained.

A man spoke. "Perhaps we could get some paperwork out of the way. Description, evaluation...."

"Anything." She seemed almost distraught. "I just want this done quickly and quietly."

"Division?" The man's voice.

"God, yes. You saw how the caretaker speaks to me."

A pause. The man again. "Class?"

"Deeper than that."

A longer pause. "Order?"

"Look around you," she said. "Chaos."

The man spoke gently. "Miss Williams, I'm trying to get a description. Let's try another approach. Habits?"

"Unspeakable."

Edwin's fury rose, hardened into malevolent cunning. He would humiliate her, destroy her. The caretaker behind him, he opened the drawing room door.

Ardel stood. "Damn you, Hemmings. It's all right, Edwin. You and I are going for a ride."

Ignoring her, Edwin addressed the strangers. "Good morning. I'm Edwin Frazier. I was not expecting callers."

They had the grace to look bewildered. "Ah ... I'm Doctor Ladera. This is my associate, Doctor Albacore. We came to take...."

Edwin was condescending, mildly amused. "You're from an asylum?"

"An arboretum."

Edwin stood stunned a moment by the enormity. Then: "*Fiend!*" He bore two men to the floor before he was subdued. He tasted blood.

Sitting heavy on Edwin's chest, Albacore panted, "He must be confined."

"He's an American citizen," Ardel admonished him.

Ladera gripped Edwin's wrists. "He is a menace to himself and others."

With a burst of inhuman strength, Edwin tore free and plunged through a window, one of the few with panes intact.

"Wait!" Hemmings held up a hand. "Mr. Frazier plainly does not welcome your presence. You are trespassing."

"We only came," Ladera protested, "to pick up the plant Miss Williams donated."

"It is not hers to donate."

"Damn your soul." Ardel stood. "You're on her side, aren't you?"

"Her?" The caretaker was calm.

"The plant, you devious bastard!" She looked at the others. "I'll call an attorney. We'll get this settled."

Only Ladera lingered, and only a moment. "I hope this can be forgotten. She seemed so rational. But someone should go after Frazier — he may be injured."

"I know his ways," Hemmings said. "I will bring him down."

"He's on drugs, then?"

"I mean I will bring him down."

**P**lunging into the wood without direction, driven by the mindless imperative of flight, Edwin came at last to the family plot. Falling on the rich, swelling loam, he felt the warmth under him, the heat of process, catalysis, generation — compost.

"Look at you. Gore from a score of gashes, prime for confinement — are you ready?"

Raising his head, Edwin stared at the horizontal slab.

"That sort of thing is seldom called for." Hemmings helped him to sit. "Generally, nature provides. And your predecessor is barely devolved."

"I thought those things depicted in the library ... even after flora.... When you said I would become part of it, I didn't understand."

"We are all part of it. Burn and slash and pave as you will, in the end

you feed it, blood and bone, flesh and ashes. Should you detonate your ultimate climax, flora would in time return, and you would be required in whatever humble form, to serve it. That is your function. You see yourselves as more impressive than the nitrogen-fixing bacteria, and your depradations can be a plague, but in the end...."

"We are put in our place."

The caretaker smiled fleetingly. "I must return you to your house, for now, or we'll be infested with searchers."

Mobley gazed at the unkempt, spectral wreck huddled on the chaise. "You think any physician would judge that competent? It's confinement, or some legal documentation that he's of sound mind."

Ardel watched him put the pen in Edwin's hand. "But signing everything over to you...."

"So attests, and may even salvage the consortium."

When it was done, Ardel helped Edwin to his feet. "And where does this leave me, Ian?"

"Out."

The house was cleaned, defoliated, fumigated. Work on Cornwall Village Vacations was resumed, fierce and dangerous strategies employed with a

view to transforming part of the dwelling into a casino.

Late on a winter afternoon, Mobley pressed the horn, then, cursing, took his luggage from the car. He let himself into the house and carried his bags to the master bedroom. This wing he had kept for himself. The upper floors would be offices, the turrets, exquisitely and functionally decorated, reserved for the discreet pastimes of certain consortium members.

Hemmings knelt before the hearth. He did not turn. "I took the liberty of laying a fire."

Uncouth but unobtrusive, and utterly devoted to the place. "Light it, then." Mobley stepped onto the stone balcony.

The waning winter twilight lent a blue-cold patina to ice-gilded ponds, frost-gleamed saniturf. At his feet lay a bit of terra cotta, its handful of soil supporting a wisp of greenery. He brought the shard inside. "This thing needs potting."

"Sir?"

"Potting. There must be a container somewhere." As he touched the trembling, lucent leaves, Mobley beheld a candent bud, delicate furled petals carmine-tinged. "Exquisite." The hair at his nape stirred. "But what is it?"

"Only flora."



*Bruce Rogers wrote a year ago: "I am 22 and am working on a BA in history at Colorado State University. I have published fiction in scholarly journals, but never SF, and have translated poetry and fiction from German, Spanish and Portuguese." His first story for F&SF concerns, among other things, the tenuous distinction between invention and discovery...*

# The Krishman Cube

BY

**BRUCE P. ROGERS**

Dr. John Quist  
Department of English  
University of Arizona  
Tucson, Arizona 85721

Dear Dr. Quist,

This office recently obtained information to the effect that you know something about the cause of the recent disturbances which have been designated as the "Spinshift Manifestation." Ordinarily, we do not follow up such tips — our office is flooded with letters from self-declared prophets and the like. In fact, we have taken to following up only the leads we develop ourselves, admitting certain rare exceptions.

An anonymous phone call made from Zurich indicated that you could give us some assistance; the caller also predicted Phase Two almost to the

hour. We cannot ignore such a coincidence, hence, this letter.

Please take the time to send us any information you may have regarding the Spinshift's causality, and forgive us for disturbing you should it turn out that the call was a hoax and that you know nothing that would help us.

Thank you.

Cordially,

Donald Hammond  
Spinshift Investigation Bureau  
Washington, D.C. 20009

Donald Hammond  
Spinshift Investigation Bureau

Dear Mr. Hammond,

I'd like to help, but I'm afraid you just wouldn't believe me.

Sincerely,  
John Quist



Dear Dr. Quist,

Your reply leads me to believe that you do indeed know something about the Spinshift, or else you are attempting to have a little fun at our expense by perpetuating a hoax. I'd like to point out two things to you. The first is that federal penalties for withholding information pertinent to the functioning of this office, or for providing false information, include fines of between \$50,000 and \$500,000 and/or prison terms not to exceed twenty years. We are very anxious to get any valid information we can, and we are not above employing a little intimidation to get it. Until now, none of our leads have worked out; I suspect this one won't either, but I must insist that you give us a straightforward reply. Second, if your story checks out, you could no doubt sell the book rights for several million dollars. After all, the public is almost as anxious to know what caused the Spinshift as we are.

I'd hate for my next letter to arrive in the hands of a federal investigator.

Sincerely,

Donald Hammond

Dear Mr. Hammond,

I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I just teach English. I am not a physicist. If you want information on the Spinshift, I suggest you consult this university's own Dr. Colin Urvater in the physics department. He is generally recognized as the nation's foremost au-

thority on the event. Your letters are a waste of your time and mine.

Sincerely,

John Quist

Dear Mr. Hammond,

I must assume you didn't take my last letter seriously. There is nothing I haven't told you. I simply don't have the information you want. I have noticed that my house and office are under surveillance 24 hours a day, and I assume that you are behind this intrusion into my private life. Please call off your dogs; I've broken no laws.

Sincerely,

John Quist

Dear Mr. Hammond,

This has really gone too far. Both my home and my office have been broken into and carefully searched. Nothing was stolen, so I assume it was the work of your investigators.

For the sanctity of my home, I will give you what information I have, but as I indicated before, you are not likely to believe me. My credentials are impeccable, but they are in American literature. There is one person who could confirm my story, but I am certain that no matter how hard you might look for her, you wouldn't be able to find her unless she wanted to be found. With her abilities, she could be anywhere. This letter probably won't change your mind about anything; Colin Urvater will continue to be hail-

ed as the chief Spinshift theorist and will continue in the role of unwilling pope for the Church of the Divine Prankster. I fully expect you to file this as another crackpot letter.

I am tempted to give you the facts all at once, but my version of these recent events will seem more plausible if I unravel all of this gradually.

A fire in the building which houses my department forced me and several of my colleagues to accept temporary offices elsewhere on the campus. I arrived at dawn on a Monday morning to inspect the space I had been assigned: an office in the physics building, which I was to share with a graduate teaching assistant (of physics). When I stepped into the room — the door had been unlocked — the sun's first yellow rays fell through the open blinds. A young woman in blue jeans and a lettered T-shirt stood over an enormous oak desk which was piled with open books. Her shirt read: WOMEN WHO SEEK EQUALITY LACK IMAGINATION. She smiled and extended her hand.

"You must be John Quist," she said.

"Dr. Quist," I corrected.

She grinned wider still. "Karen Krishman," she said, "or, as you're into titles, Pariah Krishman. That's pretty much how I'm regarded in the department."

I nodded absently. The room was incredible. Bookshelves lined two walls, and volumes of all sizes were crammed into them every which way

or else stacked on the floor near that monolithic desk. Near the door were a small, two-drawer desk and an unstable-looking chair, toward which Krishman waved. My new office. She apologized for this poor substitute for an office of my own. We chatted about my research, about the two years' work I had lost in the fire. I explained my project, a critique I was writing on previous critiques of criticism of Melville. When I felt she was sufficiently impressed, I told her that she, too, would have some project of great import to work on someday, as soon as she advanced to my level of erudition.

And then I attempted to start off my morning by grading a few composition papers at the diminutive desk.

I say, attempted. Krishman immediately went back to doing what she must have been doing before I came in. She moved back and forth from her desk to the bookshelves, pulling volumes out at random, it seemed, and then thumping them down before her. In the midst of that frenetic activity, I was unable to concentrate. So I turned around and watched her.

Krishman devoured the pages she held open on the desktop, tracing the margins of each page with a fingertip and thwapping the page whenever she seemed to find something of value. Then, from time to time, she scribbled notes onto a pad of yellow paper before reaching for another book. This furious pace was nerve-wracking, like

watching a mouse that was hyped on amphetamines scabble madly about its cage. I gazed at the bookshelves and, for the first time, noted the titles of the books. Only a few were what I would expect of a physics student: monographs and texts like *Quantum Mechanics* or *Radio Spectrometry: A Handbook for Analysis*. Among the others were *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, *Visionary Aspects of the Peyote Cult*, *The Crack in the Cosmic Egg*, and biographies of Karl Popper, Karl Marx, and William Carlos Williams.

Ostentatiously, I cleared my throat.

She kept on working.

I tried again.

She looked up from her reading.

"Oh," she said. "I hope I'm not distracting you."

"As a matter of fact..."

"You see now," she said, "why I have an office of my own. I drove the students who used to share this area with me up the wall. I'm sorry. I just don't know of any other way to work."

A pair of large volumes in front of her caught my eye. One was the Bible and the other, as near as I could guess, was the Vedas in the original Sanskrit. So, naturally, I couldn't resist asking her what she was working on.

She swept a few strings of brown hair out of her eyes and asked, "Do you really want to know?"

"I've never seen such a diverse

range of references used for a single project," I told her.

"That's because most projects are limited in their scope. I'm trying to assess the fabric of the universe, and so my sources have to reflect the nature, well, of everything, of the whole universe."

I turned my chair around and moved it before her desk. "Fabric of the universe?" I said, just a bit skeptical.

"Since you teach literature," she said, "I'll start with this." She fetched a book from a stack near the window. It was Robert Bly's *Sleepers Joining Hands*. "Have you read it?"

I shook my head. I knew something about Bly, though. He was an aging hippie poet who lived in some snowy woods somewhere. Wisconsin or Minnesota, I thought.

"Well, then," Krishman told me, "you ought to read it now. The essay in the middle of all these fine poems deals with an important archetype, that of the Great Mother. You see, there's a great deal of evidence that the earth was once dominated by matriarchies."

I must have looked incredulous, because she grabbed two other books, *Primacy of the Mother* and *The First Sex*, and handed them to me.

"Maybe that's the wrong place to start. What do you know about quantum mechanics?"

At the time, my knowledge of subatomic physics was limited to knowing that certain particles, quarks,

had taken their name from Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. I confessed this to her, and she reacted by giving me yet another book to study, an elementary physics text. I wish I could duplicate the exchange that then followed, but at that time I only understood part of what she told me. So I can't recall much of the discussion verbatim.

She talked about nuclear energy and its evolution. She told me how, just a century ago, the only energies we knew of were mechanical, thermal, electrical, gravitational, luminous, and chemical. The leap from chemical to atomic energies had been an enormous advancement, but atomic energy was by no means the last frontier for the physicist. Atoms contain substructures, systems of smaller particles, and each of those particles represents an energy potential. Now, if such substructures continue to be made of even smaller structures, then each atom is a tremendous potential powerhouse of energy that might be derived by tapping into quantum mechanical fluctuations. In other words, there exists a zero-point energy for all matter, the energy that would be freed were the matter totally unmade. Krishman told me that a cubic centimeter of virtually any substance represents an energy potential of  $10^{38}$  ergs. I had to tell her that I didn't know what an erg was. I felt uncomfortable confessing my ignorance to her. I'm a Harvard Ph.D., and she was, after all, just a master's candidate.

Krishman rummaged through the top drawer of her desk and pulled out an eraser, a ruler, and several handfuls of stubby pencils before she found what she was after. She tossed me a tiny black wooden cube. "That's one cubic centimeter," she said. "Translating the figure I just gave you into more familiar terms, the zero-point energy potential of that cube is equivalent to one hundred billion tons of uranium. Fission is terribly inefficient compared to unmaking matter."

"And getting at this energy, that's your project?"

"Yes. But I'm trying a unique approach."

"Which is?"

And she revealed to me the key to her inquiry. Since, in her view, traditional science (she called it male-structured science) didn't offer any answers, she was trying to approach this problem through what she called a "gestalt matriarchal mindset," which was so much gibberish to me. She gave me yet another book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* by Thomas S. Kuhn. She explained how science works like a stairway. That is, science usually progresses horizontally, within the accepted paradigms of the era, expanding on a basic, sound foundation. Then, inevitably, it runs into some problem that can't be solved with "normal" science, or else it hits some snag, some kind of theoretic contradiction. Then, it abandons the old system, more or less, and adopts a new one in

which the problem can be solved. That is, in a crisis, science makes a vertical leap. An example of such a leap would be the switch from a Newtonian base to an Einsteinian one.

"I'm trying to latch onto a process of obtaining knowledge which is rational, but not logical. Basically, that's what's wrong with the patriarchy: Too much rigidity and not enough magic or emotion."

I asked her what she would do with so much energy if she could get at it.

"I haven't decided," she grinned. "But it would be something spectacular."

I figured she was either a genius or a nut.

The latter possibility seemed likely after I had spoken with Urvater. I had met him in the hallway that afternoon just as I started out the door of the office.

"Dr. Colin Urvater," he introduced himself. He was a terribly respectable looking gentleman; his hair was greying, but neat, as mine is; and he had excellent conservative taste in clothes. In fact, our suits matched. "You're Dr. Quist?"

"John," I said.

"Look," he said, "I'm quite sorry about this." He walked me down the hall.

"About the fire, you mean?"

"Well, that too, certainly. But mostly about where we put you. One of the receptionists assigned you the space, though I tried to explain to her

about Krishman, how it was best to isolate her from the saner elements of the world."

"She is a bit eccentric," I observed.

"Eccentric? She's crazy! I've been working on getting her fired, but the department chairman thinks she's 'insightful.' Hell, she's a crackpot, a terrible lecturer, and a threat to the other grad students. I had to move several of them out of her office to keep them from being corrupted."

And he promised to try to get me moved.

"Even her undergraduate students complain about her," he told me as we parted. "She can't ever stay on the subject."

Near the end of the second day in her office, I decided that Karen Krishman was indeed off the wall, especially after I had watched, for another whole morning and for most of an afternoon, her frantic journeys to and from the bookshelves. I had been unable to get anything done at my desk all day, and that frustrated me increasingly. But toward four o'clock, Krishman stopped working for a moment and stood over my desk.

"Yes?" I said, looking up.

"Dr. Quist, I was wondering if you'd be able to help me with something? It's beginning to look as though I may be called onto the carpet because of my lecture methods."

"And?"

"Well, you've been teaching for quite a few years, and I'd imagine that

qualifies you as something of an expert."

Ah, flattery. What could she ask that I could turn down after that?

"Would you sit in on my lecture in ten minutes and tell me what I ought to change?"

I agreed.

**S**he began, just as the last stragglers took their seats, with the following:

"I want to preface what I'm teaching today with something you've all heard from me before. This is a basic, elementary course, and your text concisely explains everything you'll need to know in order to pass the exams. If you have questions about any formulae or concepts, I'm almost always in my office and available. The purpose of these lectures is not to teach you physics, *per se*, but to teach you that physics, religion, poetry, history, and the rest of the so-called subjects you are studying here are not separate, dividable entities. Everything in this universe fits together with everything else, and if you want to break experience down into artificial components, I suggest you transfer to another section."

And then she was off. That fifty minute lecture still whirls like a delightful mental circus as I try to recall it. She spoke about the Hindu Genesis, coral atolls, magic, druids, Charles Dickens, Chinese poetry, and the relationship between science and religion. I

can't remember a word of what she actually said, but I had the impression that ideas, charged with wonder and delight, danced forth from her as colors. Krishman's lecture was a kaleidoscope of sun-yellow, circus-red, apple-green ideas. The world not only made sense for those fifty minutes, it was *fun* as well.

What surprised me the most — though it shouldn't have after I had heard the music of her mind — was that only five or six of her students left when the class was over. These were probably the ones who had complained to Urvater. The rest of the students stayed behind to ask Krishman questions. This shocked my sensibilities somewhat, as I was accustomed to seeing students stampede the exits after my own lectures.

Once again, Krishman's mind was in flight.

She answered question after question about a myriad of topics. At one point, she began to speak about black holes and how, to an outside observer, an object falling into one would, at a certain point, seem to slow down and stop, frozen in time.

A student asked, "How do we know you're not making all this up?"

She smiled and said, "I didn't, I assure you. But someone did, just as someone made up energy and atoms."

"Discovered, you mean," said another student.

"No, I mean invented. Actually, the distinctions between invention and

discovery are tenuous, at best. A physicist named Feinberg, who was dissatisfied with Einstein's absolute speed limit, that is, the speed of light, decided to invent his way around that little inconvenience and substituted imaginary numbers for Einstein's real ones. He was thus able to postulate faster-than-light particles, which he named tachyons. Four universities are presently building machines which may detect these entities; if they succeed, did Feinberg discover something that was there all along, or did he cause tachyons to exist by looking for them? Remember when Tinkerbell is dying and Peter Pan tells the audience that if they'll only believe in fairies, Tinkerbell will live? Same principle. Invention, or discovery, by means of mentally re-ordered reality."

"Ridiculous," said one student.

"Perhaps. But we had named quarks before we found them. We ought to ask: Were quarks around before we had a name for them? And besides, Tinkerbell lives, doesn't she?"

Another student, a burly guy in a football jersey, raised his hand from the front row.

"Yes," Krishman said.

"Ms. Krishman, how many downs are there in Canadian football?" he asked.

"Three," she laughed. "Why?"

"I just wondered if there was anything you didn't know."

"Oh." She sobered some. "There's a hell of a lot. Someone whom I admire a

great deal used to talk often about how important it was to always be amazed, to admit your ignorance. He also said that anyone who could no longer stand 'rapt with wonder' at the world's many mysteries was as good as dead. I don't suppose any of you know who I'm talking about, do you?"

No one ventured a guess.

"Albert Einstein," she said. And with that, Krishman decided to end their discussion. I had never before seen students actually leave a lecture hall reluctantly, but more than a few of them dragged their feet as they departed.

I admitted to Krishman that her lecture wasn't half-bad. Actually, I knew it was the kind of talk every professor wants to give at least once: a visionary, spiritual chautauqua, a field trip to see God. But I didn't tell her that. After all, I had my Ph.D. from Harvard and, well, I think I've gone in to this once before. Basically, I was jealous.

I began to attend her lectures regularly and, without telling her about it, I wrote several letters to the head of her department to praise her in spite of her desultory speaking style, or perhaps because of it. Though I tried to conceal my admiration for her, I believe Krishman must have discovered what I was doing for her; in everything she did in my presence, she seemed to be trying to express gratitude. She began to confide in me, to tell me about advances or setbacks in her research. Half the time,

I couldn't follow what she was talking about, but she spoke so well that I always listened very carefully, nonetheless. Anyway, I was certain that because of my patronage, Urvater would fail in his attempts to have her dismissed.

And, then, she seemed to blow it all, to intentionally give everything up.

Three weeks before final exams, I found a note, written in her almost illegible script, on my desk. It read: "Off to see the wizard and sundry Amazons. Please find someone to take my lecture section. I wouldn't be so irresponsible, except that I feel very close to finding what I am after. — KK."

Dr. Urvater was only too happy to take up the challenge of repairing the "damaged minds" that Krishman had left behind. I attended one of the dry anesthetic lectures which he delivered to what had been Krishman's class. In trying to describe Urvater's oratorical style, I can think of only one valid phrase: Kurtz's last words in Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness," which were, "The horror, the horror." At the end of the lecture, the students made the kind of rush for the exits that I had been accustomed to in other classes.

Karen Krishman was dismissed in absentia.

I received three postcards from her, and they led me to consider how fine a line separated genius and madness. The first, with a local postmark and a picture of a saguaro silhouetted in the

sunset, read: "Searching for a Doña Juana. See Castaneda's works but as you read him, keep in mind the fact that women always make better necromancers than men do."

The next card came ten days later, from Brazil. The picture was of a fierce Jivaro, his spear raised menacingly. "Guess what I'm doing on the Amazon?" she wrote. "They don't really cut off their right breast, but they are tough mamas. I'm picking up a few rites of purification."

The last card was on plain white cardboard. It had been canceled in China, but read: "I'm in Nepal illegally. Having a wonderful time, wish you were here, etc. I have found the gates to the golden pavilion. Now if I can just find a hairpin and pick the lock...."

On the day that I was going to move back into my own reconstructed office, I saw Krishman for what I assumed would be the last time. I was walking across the parking lot when I happened to glance up and see the light was on in the office.

And, then, I thought I saw Krishman. Her back was to me, and she sat in what I now know is the lotus asana. She appeared to be floating several feet above the floor. Of course, by the time I had dashed across the rest of the parking lot and up two flights of stairs, I realized that, no, that couldn't have been what I had seen. Perhaps she had been sitting on top of that huge desk of hers. I had been up late the night be-



fore, grading comparison/contrast papers. So perhaps the illusion had been brought on by fatigue. By the time my hand was on the doorknob, I had caught my breath and convinced myself that what I had seen must have indeed been Krishman sitting on her desk. That was the only sound explanation I could muster, but it seemed quite reasonable. I opened the door.

"Well, hi," Krishman said. Her arms were full of books. She was standing in the middle of the room, where her oak desk used to be. I must have paled a bit, because she asked me, "What's wrong?"

"Where's your desk?"

"Out in the pickup truck, with half of my books. Why?" And she grinned like a Cheshire cat.

I didn't mention what I had seen. At the time, I believed that some of her worst traits had rubbed off on me, that I was going a little crazy myself. She had come to retrieve her books and furniture, and I helped her carry them out to the truck she had borrowed. Neither of us spoke. She seemed very tired, and I was preoccupied with watching myself for further signs of psychosis.

We came back to the office for one last load, and I picked up the books she had handed to me on that first day when she had tried to explain zero-point energy to me; they had lain on my desk all that time. She told me to put them down.

"I want you to keep those, and a few others that I'll have sent to you."

"Why?" I said, but she didn't answer. Instead, she set a stack of her scribbled notes on my desk beside the books.

"Everything essential is right there. Provided I can goad you into looking in the first place, you won't have to search as far as I did. You'll have to learn to think a little less rigidly, a little more in step with the moon."

"What are you talking about?" I asked, but she was already on her way out of the room. A week later, a courier service delivered about fifty books to my office. I stacked them, still sealed in their boxes, out of the way in a corner.

And that was that.

Well, not quite.

No one who was awake during the Spinshift, I am sure, will ever forget what they were doing when it happened. In my case, it was late afternoon, close to sunset. I was grading some composition papers and was about halfway through my second peanut butter sandwich when my head was filled with an annoying buzz and I jolted forward onto my desk. As I peeled the sandwich from my nose, I had a strange intimation of nausea that told me, somehow, that what I had just experienced had been no ordinary earthquake.

The fellow who works in the office across from mine, Wayne Tremblay, appeared in my doorway. Now, Wayne is a poet, so I wasn't sure how to react when he said, "God is either

pissed or having some fun at my expense."

How does one respond to that? I said what I usually say in response Wayne: "Oh?"

He motioned me into his office and pointed at the orange, western sky.

"I was watching the sunset," he told me. "Then there was that tremor. And then... Well, tell me if you see what I see."

"What's that?"

"Watch the sun."

I did.

It was rising.

The sun was rising in the west.

I won't detail what followed then, Mr. Hammond. No doubt, you know more about the accusations that we exchanged with the Soviets, the tense hours when hands were poised above the buttons of holocaust (forgive me if I sound melodramatic). The papers were never very clear about why both sides suddenly calmed down, but I suspect that someone must have pointed out to them that if the other side did indeed have the ability to reverse the earth's spin, that an attack might well be suicide; who knows what other powers the enemy might possess? And you probably know considerably more than I about most of the religious revivals, the mass conversions to every faith, the rise of new churches that took place even in Communist states during those first few months. Then everyone finally got used to having the sun rise in the west and set in the east.

The world returned to business as usual. You must admit, it's surprising what we can adjust to.

Something you probably haven't been as close to, however, is the birth and development of the Church of the Divine Prankster. As I'm sure you know, Dr. Urvater, Krishman's nemesis in the physics department, had been one of the few scientists in the world to offer even a remotely reasonable explanation for what had happened and how it was that we weren't hurled into space because of our own momentum. It must have been the only creative thought the man had had in his career, because he delighted so in speaking about it. The idea was simple enough. Since molecules constantly vibrate, the Spinshift was a matter of every atom in and on the earth vibrating, in unison, in the same direction for a heartbeat or two. That is, all molecules, due to an incredibly unlikely synchronization of their motions, moved simultaneously in the direction counter to the earth's spin; we survived the event only through the happy accident that all things happened to change gears at the same time. It doesn't sound like much of a theory, but in cases like this one, you take what you can get.

A television reporter asked Urvater once if he meant by all this that the Spinshift was a fluke in the universal plan, that God was playing a practical joke. Urvater said that, no, the matter was more complicated than that. But one or two impressionable minds

latched on to the reporter's question, disregarding Urvater's reply. Since people were ready to buy any idea that attempted to explain the Spinshift, Urvater soon had two followings. The first consisted of scientists who were grateful for an explanation that at least sounded something like rational science. The second was a cult of crazies who wore squirting flowers and joy buzzers as the insignia of the Church of the Divine Prankster. The latter entourage followed him around and called him their "prophet of pranksterism, message bearer for our giddy God."

To which Urvater would reply, "If you don't buzz off, I'm calling the campus police."

But they stuck with him, and when he did call the police, the best they could do was cite the cult for trespass. In a day or so, Urvater's unwanted followers would be back, and the police had other things to do than chase off harmless, if annoying, worshippers.

The church grew. There was something about its name that appealed to the disoriented, and there were very few people whom the Spinshift had not disoriented. When the CDP boasted a world-wide membership of five hundred thousand, Urvater called an evening press conference/lecture and invited several well-known theorists to come and help him explain the hard science behind his theory and dispel the mysticism that had grown up around it. He wanted to be a scientist, not a pope.

It was at that press conference, held in an auditorium on the campus and under heavy security (intended to keep the Divine Prankster devotees out) that I again saw Karen Krishman. She was wearing the same T-shirt and jeans that I had first seen her in, and from her neck there dangled a golden pendant with unrecognizable inscriptions. I wondered how she had managed to get in — passes were specially arranged for by the university, and Urvater had personally screened the guest list. I knew he'd never knowingly admit Krishman. But I didn't have time to ask her about that, or anything else, for that matter. I ran into her just before Urvater's first defender began his address, and we exchanged only enough words to agree to sit together. Her only words to me as she smiled through the first six speakers were: "What these people need is another good dose of doubt to open up their minds."

Then Urvater himself stepped on-stage to explicate his ideas. As he began to speak, I noticed Krishman was shaking violently. She was struggling hard to keep from laughing aloud. And I felt sure, now, that I had final proof that she had cracked. Eventually she regained her composure and listened to the rest of Urvater's proclamation, occasionally trying unsuccessfully to suppress a titter.

Urvater wound up with these words: "The phenomenon we have called the Spinshift was the result of pure chance, and I can say in all cer-

tainty that, due to the tremendous unlikelihood of its ever having happened in the first place, it will never happen again."

And Karen Krishman muttered, barely loud enough for me to hear her, "You wanna bet?"

My head buzzed and I was thrown, as was everyone else in the auditorium, into the seat in front of me. No one in the building moved or spoke. We were stunned. We all knew what had happened; it had happened once before. By the time I stood up to look for Krishman, she was gone. I tried the lobby, the parking lot, until I realized that she could be anywhere. Nepal or Brazil, for example.

Or securely ensconced on Mars.

I walked toward my car. I didn't feel too astounded by this second phase of the Spinshift. You get used to things, you see. And, besides, I had the rare honor of knowing what had caused the earth to resume its old course. As I reached for my car keys, I found, at the bottom of my pocket, a tiny black wooden cube.

I held that cube in my open palm and watched the stars make their gradual westward sweep. I thought of black holes, Tinkerbell, Canadian football, and little black cubes. Then I remembered the books and notes that Krishman had given me. I turned toward my office.

And, so, there it is. Since then, I've been reading, thinking, and experimenting. I don't know if I'll be able to

overcome my stuffy masculine orientation enough to piece together the clues Krishman left for me. I believe I at least know why she picked me as her apprentice; you see, if I can learn to accept the idea of matriarchal thought as a vital element to freeing my mind, then anyone can. And I've at least recognized what an old pedant I've always been, which is a pretty good start. I just may be able to repeat Krishman's stunt or, perhaps, do something more creative.

I hope this satisfies your curiosity enough to keep you out of my office and home in the future.

Cordially,  
John Quist

Dr. Quist,

Are you going to give us a straight story or not?

Donald Hammond

Dear Mr. Hammond,

Regarding your inquiries about Dr. John Quist, I am afraid he is no longer with our faculty. Two weeks ago, he asked that his classes be assigned to someone else, and he disappeared. I wish I could be of more help. The gentlemen from your Bureau who came here seemed very anxious to find him. Unfortunately, this is all the information I have.

Sincerely,  
Hamilton Campbell, Chairman  
Department of English  
University of Arizona

*Barry Malzberg's most recent book is THE ENGINES OF THE NIGHT, essays about SF (Doubleday). In this new story, Harry Truman confronts eight-foot marsupial aliens and passes the buck...*

## **Blair House**

BY  
**BARRY N. MALZBERG**

**T**ruman does not quite know what to do. Does not know how to handle this. It is a new sensation for him; he has always been a decisive man; his enemies may take him for superficial, but in a difficult world of hard choices encircled by an increasingly powerful Communist threat the only sin is inaction. He ordered the bomb. He decided to run even when his own party was ready to dump him and beat that simpering clown Dewey, fair and square. Took the gauntlet in Korea. Stayed beneath the 38th parallel. Fired that lunatic MacArthur and made it stick. In retrospect all of this was easier than it seemed at the time; he had settled on a point and stuck to it. But this is a new situation.

This is an entirely new situation. The aliens have landed on the White House lawn and have demanded that he turn over the government to them

or they will incinerate the planet. They claim they have the weapons to do it, and who would dispute them? Any group of eight-foot hanging marsupials that could travel from the Ceres system in enormous craft certainly possesses the technology to blow up a small planet near a forgotten star. At least this is what the scientists have told him. Where the hell is Ceres anyway? He cannot seem to keep this straight in his mind. Not that it matters anyway. Ceres system, spaceships, eight-foot marsupial aliens, it was all just a bunch of science fiction bosh until three days ago. Now he is up against it, though. There is no question about it.

Harry Truman sits in his working quarters at Blair House and says to Dean Acheson, his Secretary of State, "I'd like to call their bluff. I don't think they'll do it."

Acheson says, "I'll support you in a

hard line if you want to take it." He stubs out his cigar. "On the other hand, they seem to have the capability to do what they threaten." The secretary's hand trembles slightly. The situation is upsetting him, there is no question about it. Acheson was the rock of his cabinet; he would have planted a bomb on Moscow at any time since 1945, Truman knows, and it has taken all of his force of personality to keep the man in place. Nonetheless he appears to be crumbling. It is a testimony to the power of the aliens, eight of them in three enormous spaceships. In the statements they have given to the world, wearing life-support gear, standing outside their ships, they have succeeded in throwing quite a shock into everyone. Even Stalin has had no official comment on the episode. Sources deep within the network report that old Uncle Joe is gibbering.

"Did you contact Einstein?" Truman asks. "What did he say?"

Acheson shrugs. In certain postures, Truman thinks, he bears a discomfiting resemblance to Dewey. "He says that he's a physicist, not an astronomer, a sociologist or an exobiologist. He doesn't have anything to say at all."

"Coward," Truman says.

"Can you blame him?" Acheson takes out another cigar, looks at his watch. "We've only got another three hours until their deadline," he says.

"I know that as well as you do," Truman says. He feels his famous tem-

per about to explode. The situation is infuriating. He is the President of the United States, and yet he is being humiliated by a group of grotesque creatures with translator gear who look like inflated raccoons and who nest in the trees surrounding the White House lawn while they make threatening statements about the future of the planet. "Don't you think I know that I've got three hours? The Joint Chiefs want me to call their bluff. They're of the opinion that they don't have the armament, and anyway we can always incinerate them; they'd never achieve escape velocity."

"We know about the Joint Chiefs," Acheson says cautiously.

"MacArthur has offered to come out of retirement to lead the attack," Truman says. He slams the desk top. "Godamn it," he says, "at least I said I wouldn't run again before this happened. Otherwise the press would have said that it's some kind of stunt."

"I should go back to the war room," Acheson says.

"Don't want to be on the spot, eh?"

"There's no telling what the generals will do," Acheson says. "There's a great deal of panic."

"Go on," Truman says, "go on, get the hell back. I'm not asking you for advice anyway. I know I'm in this one alone."

"I don't think they'd blow us up," Acheson whispers. "Besides, it may be a stunt. Maybe the Russians sent them over. Maybe they came from Holly-

wood. How do we know? We're just looking at a bunch of ships and raccoons."

"Go away," Truman says. Acheson stands, flicks cigar ash, leaves the office. Truman picks up the phone and tells the appointments secretary that he does not want to be disturbed for half an hour; then he goes to the couch and lies on his back, draws up his knees and stares at the ceiling. Sometimes he gets some of his best ideas after awakening from one of his well-known cat-naps. He finds them as bracing as his morning constitutionals.

But there is no rest for him this time. The events of the last days waver across his consciousness: the landing, the panic, the ringing of the capital by Washington police and then army troops, the arrogant pronouncements in English which the aliens broadcast through loudspeakers. Then the insane press conferences with the aliens emerging from the ship to hang from branches and harangue the press on the corruption and instability of all Terran life, their decision that they must land and civilize the planet by running it. The cabinet meetings, the all night conferences. Fortunately he has been insulated from the impact this has had upon the country. The impact has been terrible, he gathers; most of the cities are being abandoned by millions heading for the mountaintops, and there is shooting, fasting and prayer on the farmlands. It is a damned good thing that he declared out a few months ago

because whatever the outcome of this he is going to get the worst of it for sure. Even if he stands up to the aliens at the end, he has lost a great deal of ground by capitulating up to this point. Perhaps he should have let the Joint Chiefs use the atom bomb. But everything would have to have been evacuated through a radius of 500 miles, and that would make a terrible situation even worse.

Truman thinks of his political career. Up until three days ago it has been a remarkable adventure, unsullied by any feeling of doom. He had never expected to be put in a position like this; everything has worked out so nicely for him up until this point. The top of his ambition had been to sit in the Senate; even though he knew Roosevelt was failing, he had never viscerally expected to be President until the moment that he had gotten the terrible news. After that everything had fallen into place. He would have been beaten for sure this time out; everyone knew that the Republicans were going to get Eisenhower, but seven years of this was enough for any sane man. He had been looking forward to an honorable retirement, maybe even going back and serving in Congress after a couple of years back in Independence. Now this. It left him simply without a position, and this had never happened to him before. As long as you could make a decision, kick a critic, drop a bomb, hold fast on the Yalu, you could get through, but what were you supposed

to do when you were confronted by a situation like this? No American President, not even Lincoln, had ever had to contend with a mess like this. The aliens might be clowns, all of this might be a Soviet plot rigged to make him appear foolish, but how could you take the risk? How could you put the lives of everyone on the planet at stake even if there was only a small chance that these marsupials from Ceres could do what they threatened?

Harry Truman uses the spittoon, curses. This thing must come to an end. He picks up the telephone and asks for Barkley; the old gent is in the Senate chambers where of course things have been in recess for three days. "Hold the fort," he says, "I'm going to go over and talk to them."

"Talk to who?" Barkley says. He is a clean old fellow but not as sharp as he used to be. "The generals? That's the spirit. Roll right in. Take their bluff. I'm with you all the way, Harry, if that's your decision."

"Not the generals," Truman says. "The marsupials."

"The who?"

"The fellas on the goddamned front lawn of the goddamned White House!"

There is a thick pause. "Harry," Barkley says, "I don't know if that's such a good idea, Harry. They got spaceships, they probably got weapons. Maybe the telephone?"

"Got to do it in person. That's why I'm calling you. I just want you to kind of mind the store while I'm over there.

If anything happens to me they'll know who to reach."

"Anything happens to you?" Barkley's voice quavers. "Harry, I don't think that's such good thinking. If you want anyone to go over there and talk to them, why not get MacArthur? He's itching to get back into this."

"If the press talked to them, I can," Truman says angrily. "God-damned MacArthur just wants to be back in the newspapers, get his career together. He's not getting anything past me. No, Alben, you don't have to do anything. I'm not asking you to come with me. Just stay where you are and let them know where they can reach you."

"Well," Barkley says hesitantly, "well, all right, Harry. This is pretty tricky stuff, you know. Those boys are supposed to come from another galaxy; they pack a hell of a wallop, maybe."

"Same galaxy," Truman says. "Same goddamned galaxy." He hurls down the phone, picks up his suit jacket and walks through the door of his office. Two secret service personnel dozing in straight chairs bolt up. "I'm going to take a little walk over to the White House lawn," he says. "I'm going to go alone. I don't want protection."

"Mr. President—"

"Think this is the only way," Truman says. He makes a dismissive gesture. "You sit tight." They subside



on their chairs, apparently debating whether Truman has the authority to release them. "Don't worry about it," Truman says, "there aren't any Puerto Rican nationalists in those spaceships, that's for sure."

He walks down the corridor, nods at the appointments secretary, out the door. Fortunately, he has been so casual about his movements over the years that this attracts little attention; even in national crisis they are accustomed to a President who often strolls out for his own newspaper. Across the street he sees the three tall silver ships glinting in the late afternoon sun; shadows of the monument playing over them. There are no signs of activity; sometimes the aliens have come out to sun themselves on the rocket tips, but at the moment, apparently, they are all inside. Truman walks briskly through the gate and across the street. Traffic is sparse; there has been little movement in the capital — in the country itself — in these recent days. The guard at the White House gate comes to attention as Truman approaches, steps toward him. Truman waves him away. "Just going in for a little talk," he says.

The guard steps to one side. Truman walks to the lawn. He supposes that the aliens landed on the White House lawn because they did not know that the President had moved into Blair House weeks ago while repairs were made on the mansion. This is one of the strongest reasons, Truman supposes, to think that it is *not* a Russkie move be-

cause certainly the Soviets would have known about this. He walks across the grass to the nearest spaceship and gestures vigorously. He knows that the lawn is under constant surveillance; the Joint Chiefs have reported the presence of scanners. "Want to talk to you a little," Truman shouts. His voice carries easily in the late April afternoon. "Send out your representative."

A hatch opens and a raccoon's head peers out. "That's fine," Truman says. "Come on down, I just want to talk some."

A claw emerges from the access, makes gestures at the head. "All right," Truman says, "I understand. Get some gear on and then let's discuss things a little."

The hatch closes. Truman waits patiently, thinking of his political career. It has been an astonishing journey, and along the line he has certainly angered a good many influential people. Perhaps this is not the Soviets but Republicans; it is the kind of thing that the party of Taft, Stassen, Wilkie and Dewey would try. But then again and very possibly it is not a prank. If he only he could have been sure of one thing or the other, he would not be in this position, he reminds himself. It is a very humiliating position, but it is not going to be entertained much longer.

The hatch opens and a figure clambors out, bulky in gear, weaving on the platform. Truman waves. "Come on down," he says genially, "stand on the lawn. There's no need

for me to look up at you like this. You're always going to be taller than me, but let's deal with this face to face."

The figure seems to shrug, continues on down the platform, walks across the lawn. Inside the helmet he can see the square raccoon's face, the intelligent eyes. Perhaps it is not a prank after all. "Come on," Truman says, "come over here." The figure closes the distance, stands a few feet away. "That's fine," Truman says, "isn't that better now? Now we can talk."

"You are the President?" the figure says. The voice through the translating equipment is without inflection but not unpleasant. "You are Mr. True Heart?"

"Truman," he says. "Listen, haven't these people to whom you've been talking gotten my *name* straight?"

"My apologies, Mr. Truman," the alien says. "There have been many names and faces. We have wanted to talk to you from the first. Why have you not come before now?"

"Well," Truman says, "that was not exactly my decision. I should have come from the outset. Look here," he says reasonably, "what are you doing, dealing ultimatums to us, threatening our government and way of life if we don't capitulate to you and so on? It's ridiculous. That's not the way we do things in America."

"We are not threatening," the alien says. "We are merely distressed at circumstances. Your inhabitants seem un-

able to control their own lives. So we wish to assume control for your own good. It need only be a temporary measure."

"Yeah," Truman says, "yeah, well, buddy, that isn't the way it happens. In a free land you don't turn over control to anyone else, and you don't take promises that it will only be a short while. Maybe you'd get a better response from the other side, but that's not how we operate."

"We do not wish to deal with the other side. The Russkies you call them? We have heard about them. We do not wish to deal with them but with you."

"Well, that's probably to your advantage. If you had been dealing with them instead of us, you probably would have been attacked days ago."

"To their disadvantage. We are invulnerable."

"Well, you might well be," Truman says, "but you haven't seen our armaments yet." He makes a deprecatory gesture. "Let's not talk about armaments, attacks," he says. "let's be reasonable here. What do you want to take over this planet for? We've got a pretty decent situation, all things considered. So it can't be for our own good, and if you want to conquer us, you'd probably find we have more fight than you expect. Why don't you simply go back to where you came from and check with us in fifty years? You might be surprised how much further along we'll be."

"That is not possible. Those are not

our orders. We are supposed to achieve a resolution now."

"Fine," Truman says, "here's your resolution. We appreciate your offer of conquest, but we're simply not interested. Say that you were turned back with thanks."

"That will not work."

"Then say that you were turned back with threats. That should do it. Say that we have weapons for which you never had an accounting, that we're much more dangerous than you thought we were."

"Mr. Truman," the marsupial says, "that is an interesting offer but we have heard it already. Why should we take it from you?"

"Because I'm the President, goddamn-it," Truman says, "and an offer from the President carries more weight than from anyone else because of the office, the authority. We're negotiating here. You go back and take your friends home, and I'll do my best to keep things under control here and prove that we don't need outside supervision. Next time around, you'll see that I was right. That's my bargain. If you really have our best interests at heart, you'll take it."

"It is an interesting offer," the alien says. "It is the first time that we have been made it by someone in your authority. But precisely what guarantees do we have that you are telling the truth and that you are capable of self-governance?"

"You have the word of the President."

"Mr. Truman, to yourself you are the President but to us you are merely a symbol. In the cosmos you would be surprised of how little importance symbols are."

"You have my word," Truman says. "Come back in fifty years and it will be proven. Any difficulties you see will be solved. You will have been saved all the trouble and expense of what would be an ugly fight, let me tell you. We Americans don't take conquest either."

The alien pauses; the silence is very much reminiscent of the pauses in his conversation with old Barkley. "You are a courageous man, Mr. Truman," the marsupial says. "If your word is that strong, if it has the same power as your courage, then it must be taken very seriously. I will confer with my colleagues. Fifty years?"

"Right on the nose," Truman says. "Fifty years right on the button. You come back and you'll see."

"We will give it much consideration," the alien says, "and you will know soon of our decision." It turns and moves back toward the ramp, wafting the faint odor of cinnamon. For the first time Truman thinks that these creatures may indeed be what they represent themselves to be. It is not only the smell but the aspect of their presence; a foreignness which goes far beyond anything he has glimpsed at the United Nations.

"Soon you will know our decision, Mr. Truman," the alien says and

mounts the ramp, turns, waves and disappears in the hatchway. There is the sound of clanging steel.

Truman shrugs and walks slowly away from the three ships, first moving backwards so that he can stare at them, then turning and moving briskly over the lawn back toward the gate. To turn your back on an enemy is to show strength; it might also be contempt, but this is a risk that he will have to take. At the gate he nods at the guard and trudges back across the street toward Blair House. At least I made a decision, he thought. At least I made a clear choice. Now it's up to them. If they don't decide to take it ... by God, Truman thinks, if they don't decide to take it, I'll tell the Joint Chiefs to do what they want to as my last act, and I'll resign and give this thing to Barkley. Let *him* run it. At least I'll be back in Independence before tomorrow is out.

He waves cheerfully to the guard outside Blair House, waves to his ap-

pointments secretary and goes back into his office. As he enters he hears for the second time in three days the pounding, the surreal hum, the sound of the fires. He looks out the window in time to see the ships, one by one, gracefully ascend.

By God I *did* it, Harry Truman thinks. All they needed from the first was a stern talking-to.

The image of the fires bloom on the panes of his office. They'll be back in fifty years, Truman thinks suddenly. That was the agreement, fifty years.

Well, what the hell. In fifty years we'll have this whole damned place cleaned up, he thinks. Nothing to worry about.

Nothing to worry about.

"Come on, Alben," he says in a moment over the phone, "bring over a pint of bourbon and I'll tell you all about it." In the background he hears the thin sound of Senate cheering.

Fifty years *is no problem at all*, thinks Harry Truman.

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## Coming soon

Next month: a new novelet from **Larry Niven**, **THE LION IN HIS ATTIC**, along with stories by **Jane Yolen**, **Gary Jennings**, and others. Coming in October: a special 33rd anniversary issue, with several surprises, among them brand new stories by **Damon Knight** and **J. G. Ballard**!

# Films

BAIRD  
SEARLES



Drawing by Gahan Wilson

## ELECTRIC GRANNY, ECLECTIC ALICE

The consumers of science fiction and fantasy (I use the odd word "consumers" instead of "audience" or "readers" for reasons that will be apparent), a very tight community within living memory, have within the past decade split into two species, separate but not necessarily exclusive, and sometimes antagonistic because they don't realize they're operating on different premises.

The two might be called readers and viewers, since one set reads, the other fulfills its needs with films and television. This is going on the assumption (which I do) that a certain kind of person *needs* — not just likes — fantasy (including s/f, of course). Readers have been able to fill that need more or less easily since the invention of printing, and before that, with stories communicated verbally.

But the person not attuned to reading (a perfectly valid way to be, despite what some of the snobbier readers say) and needful of fantasy has been in a bad way for his fix. It finally came, I think, with *Star Trek*, the first *true* science fiction to be promulgated to a mass audience (a debatable point, certainly, but think about it). This accounts for the *Trek* phenomena — the s/f viewer species had coalesced, and for quite a while all they had to cherish was *Star Trek*, which they certainly did with a vengeance.

Then the horizons widened with *Star Wars* and everything that followed; the new field now has its own magazines and its own awards.

I think this theory is worth exploring, but this is not the place. (Let me add just one thing: I believe the s/f reader won't be happy about a convention until there's one that will again be devoted to him.) I bring it up because we have an interesting cross-species work under consideration this month. It's from a well known science fiction (well, sort of — more on that later) story, given an excellent production for TV. How many of those can you think of, even including theatrical release movies? *Lathe of Heaven*, yes. Anything else? (Don't give me *2001*; Clarke's short story was basically a jumping-off point.) Only a bare handful, certainly.

So we have readers' property brought into viewers' turf. On TV it was called *The Electric Grandmother*; it's based on Ray Bradbury's "I Sing the Body Electric." It worked well, all things considered.

I must admit I'm not fond of the original material; it comes from that period of Bradbury stories (post *Martian Chronicles*) when he was edging back into fantasy with a touch of whimsy and a science-fictional facade. (This may well be why it appealed as a TV property, as more suitable to mass audience taste.) In this case, we have a motherless family who commissions a robot grandmother to fill its needs. She

arrives on a month's trial basis; the two male children take to her, but the sister resists her for fear that she will leave as the mother did. This is resolved happily at the 11th hour, and the children grow up under the robot's care, and when they return to the family home in old age, reinstall her to take care of them.

It's a fable, as you can see, rather than a solid genre piece; I think it came across better on the screen than in print. This is partially attributable to Maureen Stapledon as the Granny, wonderfully warm without being sticky, and some imaginative production touches, such as her arrival by helicopter, dangling as cargo packaged in an elaborate mummy case. The robot factory (Fanticcini Productions) was a Dr. Coppelius workshop out of E.T.A. Hoffman, a little scary around the edges.

That good young actor, Edward Herrmann, was nicely hand-wavingly helpless as the father, and the child actors played children acceptably.

If it reruns, the readers might give it a try; I'm not so sure about the viewers — nobody gets zapped.

Another far-from-obscure fantasy appeared on the small screen recently, this one a little less easy to cope with. *Alice At the Palace* was produced first on stage by the New York Shakespeare Festival; by Elizabeth Swados, it was characterized as "a music hall" based on Carroll's characters. What that turned out to be was scenes from both

Alice books, given some unexpected flavors and musical twists, with very little of the linking material.

It was reminiscent of an actor's improvisation class given the Alice creatures to play with; the cast, numbering about twelve, became various characters, chorus and spectators. The result was mixed, but there were some interesting moments. The caterpillar, for instance, was the entire cast, each sitting between the legs of the person behind them, up a ladder. With all the arms going, it was very effective, and the head spoke in a sort of sing-song Islamic croon, inspired by the hookah, no doubt.

The Red Queen was a racy lady straight off the Barbary Coast, the Mock Turtle and Griffin a classic Jewish mother and son turn, and the dormouse told his story of Elsi, Tillie and Lacie to a country music beat.

(There were also moments inspired by Presley and Baez.) Maybe the nicest scene was Alice and the White Knight (portrayed by an actor who looks unnervingly like John Belushi), on a bare stage, singing the dreary song, "A-sitting On A Gate."

The excellent actress Meryl Streep showed surprising vocal finesse as Alice, but was a bit awkward in the sometimes-demanding choreography. A tiny young man named Michael Jeter almost stole the show as Bill, the lizard, the dormouse, and the baby that turns into a pig, as which he managed the most amazing grunts and falsetto scat singing (!).

I'd come to *Alice At the Palace* pretty sure I'd hate it, as I have all other attempts to transfer Alice beyond the printed page. But the intriguing moments were worth those that didn't work.

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*From Richard Mueller: "Born 1946 in New Jersey, BA (theatre) from Iowa Wesleyan, MA (playwriting) from CSU, MFA (acting) University of Iowa, making me one of the most overeducated people I know. Worked as a DJ, actor, director, cook, high school English teacher..." Mr. Mueller also served in the US Coast Guard on a lightship and a rescue boat crew, which accounts for the authentic tone of the first-rate story below.*

# The Chains of the Sea

BY

RICHARD MUELLER

**T**he station was almost deserted when the storm hit, no one left aboard but the Ready Boat crew, the duty cook, two seamen without the means to go anywhere on a Saturday night, and the radio operator. He stood high on the catwalk, the widow's walk perched on the peak of the station-house roof, watching the grey north sky explode with black and the anemometer crank itself up into a dizzying whir as the winds came. Sand galloped off the dunes and splattered the windows. The radio operator covered his mouth with his cap against the blowing grit and watched Bear, the station's Lab-Newfie mascot, barreling full-out for the galley door. With a slam he was through it and gone.

On the bay side of the peninsula, the storm flags snapped, and the water had turned wild, sending the dragboats scuttling for cover and churning the

marshlands into mud. The lights of the bay bridge and the distant town shone bravely as the darkness built above them, and he could see cars on 101 heading in toward the safety of buildings and sidewalks, away from the primeval redwoods to the south. "Maybe we should stay in Eureka till this thing blows itself out, hon."

He knew differently. He'd seen this sort of blow before, and when they came, they came to stay until they had wrecked whatever was loose and loosened whatever wasn't. And they said there were no hurricanes in the Pacific. He shook his head and went hand over hand along the shivering railing, back to the tower.

Below in the boathouse, the two off-duty seamen shot pool on a regulation pool table that stood on the unused pad that had once held the station's 36-foot crashboat. The boat had



gone to the breaker's, and now it was void space, storage space, pool table space, space to be kept clean in case you needed it. Above the space hung a lacquered wooden sign with U.S. COAST GUARD and the Coast Guard emblem on the land side. On the seaward side were the words *You have to go out but you don't have to come in.* The smaller seaman tried for the six and missed. The shot went to his partner, and he stepped back, chalking his cue, trying to look older than eighteen. He had pimples, looked sixteen, and no bartender anywhere in the country would have served him. Rain lashed the windows and forced itself in under the garage-like doors.

"Ooh-woo, I'm glad I'm not goin' out tonight."

Chipps, the duty seaman, knew that this was for his benefit and forced a grin. He had a good four years on these two greenhorns, and he'd been out on worse nights than this. Truth be told, he'd been scared brown too, but he wasn't about to let these clowns know. So he walked to the window that looked out on the dock and peeled back the curtain.

The 44-foot boat was pitching like a mad horse in the chute at a rodeo, and the useless 40-foot swung clanking at her buoy, her diesel out for the third time this month. The long finger dock swayed, casting sickly shadows under the hooded lights, and a flight of thoroughly miserable gulls huddled at the foot of the ramp, refusing to go

anywhere. He'd seen that before. If you tried to walk through them, they'd let you step on them before they'd move out of your way. So you had to detour around them or pick them up and heave them downwind. Even the stupid birds knew better than to go out on a night like this.

Beyond the dock, the world ended; no lights of town, no channel marker range lights, no stack lights on the power plant. The ocean beyond the horizon started at the station dock and led out forever, and he hoped, he prayed to Jesus and Neptune and St. Christopher that there would be no boat call tonight.

"So whaddaya think, Chipps?"

"I think there's a call tonight, I'm takin' a trainee along to ride the spray shield."

The pool players laughed.

"No way, man," but there were nerves in it, and it made Chipps feel better. He scooped up his foul-weather jacket and headed for the tower.

Jackson made the run from Married Quarters to the galley door in record time, but he was still soaking wet when he crashed onto the mess deck. He stripped off his jacket and hung it up to dry as the cook appeared with a mop and cleaned up after his footprints.

"Sorry, Mac."

"S'okay."

Jackson pulled a length of copper tubing from his shirt and handed it to Beller.

"This do?"

"I think so, thanks," Beller said, turning it over, examining it, blowing down it. Jackson pushed the wet hair off his forehead and sat down across the table from the engineer.

"How's it going?"

It was a large wooden model that Beller was constructing, fully carved from pine and being fitted in metal, of the space shuttle *Kearsarge*. The tubing was for the bow thrusters. The thing was fully three feet long, and Jackson was fascinated with Beller's patience and his perfectionist drive. Each angle was perfect, every plane exact. Beller had obtained blueprints from his brother, a pilot in the NASA fleet, and he had used them to construct templates so that each wooden shape would be correct: The cargo bay folded back and contained a working crane that he and Chief Accord had built in the machine shop, and when the model was finished, it would have each light fiber-opticked and a fully lit and detailed cabin. It was magnificent.

"It's beautiful, Tom."

"Thanks," Beller blushed, uncomfortable with any sort of praise. "How's Carol?"

"She's at her sister's in Eureka. They closed the bridge..."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. The water's up over Bird Island again, and she didn't want to drive all the way around the bay, so I told her to stay over."

Beller looked out of the window.

"I don't blame her. I don't want to

go out in that crap either." He whistled, ducking instinctively as a gust hammered the window.

"I'll bet they're getting it bad in town."

"Well, the peninsula lines are dead. They went out in the middle of the call."

Beller looked at Jackson, and the big man nodded. Beller shrugged and took another look out of the window. The rain was coming down so fast he could barely make out the dock lights. The building gave a shudder in the wind, and Bear looked up from his corner and whimpered. Mac took him a Milk Bone.

"Calm down, ya big coward, ya killer beast. It's only the wind."

It moaned again, and Beller knew exactly what Jackson was thinking. Don't send me out in that, not tonight.

The phone buzzer exploded, and Beller grabbed it.

Dead silence, even the dog.

"Beller."

Mac froze, watching him, and Jackson reached slowly for his coat. Beller relaxed.

"Fred wants you in the tower, Bob. Phone call."

Jackson took all three flights, two steps at a time, "drying off the hard way," as he called it. When he got there, Fred Head, the lanky, bearded radio operator, was jotting notes on a clipboard, the Watts phone jammed

between his ear and shoulder. Watts cables were underground and didn't go out in the storms. Chipps was working at the wall map with grease pencil and dividers, marking off the coordinates he was reading from the clipboard. Chipps saw him and nodded.

"Fred."

"Um? Oh, 'lo, Bob. Edwards."

"Edwards?" Bob whispered, taking the phone.

"Edwards Air Force Base."

Jackson's eyebrows went up but he said calmly, "This is the duty officer. Go ahead please."

There was a burst of static on the line as lightning lit up the tower; then a calm, authoritative voice came through.

"State your name and rank, please."

"Chief Boatswain's Mate Robert W. Jackson."

"Hold please."

There was a long silence before a voice clicked back in. It was an older man who sounded tired, fatherly tired.

"How'd you get the scar, Chief?"

Jackson's fingers went instinctively to the whiteline creasing his cheek.

"A towline snapped on the Columbia River bar. Why?"

"Checking, Chief. There's a certain amount of confidential right now, though I'm damned if I know why. The information I'm going to give you is for your ears, and the ears of your crew, only. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yessir."

"Good. I've already given your radio op the coordinates, and he says he's got it traced..."

"He does," Bob promptly replied, and Head and Chipps looked at him, wondering what was going on.

"Good. Got a good crew, Chief? Do you trust them?"

"Yes, on both accounts, sir. I have, with my life."

"Good," came the tired voice. "You're going to again, tonight. I've given you impact coordinates for a point approximately eighteen miles southwest of your station. You're the closest unit. There's one of your tugs, the *Cherokee*, thirty miles south, and we have a destroyer on the way down from Portland, but you'll have to do the job until they get there. The damned thing will impact in less than twenty minutes, and we don't expect it to stay afloat more than two hours. We'd put a chopper in the air if we could, but Weather says it'll be dawn before anything'll be able to stay up. Can you reach it in two hours?"

Jackson ran through it all in his head: wind, waves, engines, tide. All things considered...

"I think so, sir."

"Good, then..."

"Sir," he broke in, signaling for Head to hit the boat alarm. "Just what is it we're supposed to be looking for? A plane?"

The alarm began to reverberate in the station below. On the phone the old voice sighed.

"Damn, I'm sorry, son. A shuttle. We've got a space shuttle coming in out of control up there. I thought I told you."

The klaxon could scarcely be heard above the roar of the storm as the three stumbled down the finger dock in their wetsuits, boat bags clutched in cold fingers, each bag containing the basic survival gear that some optomist at headquarters thought would keep them alive if the boat went down in fifty-degree water. Madness, sheer madness. The klaxon screamed out its song, "Suits and Paddles," according to Jackson, who had been listening to such klaxons for seventeen years. Chipps thought of it only as "The Death Rattle," and had no trouble hearing it above the wind as he bent to throw off the bowline. "Goddamngoddamngoddamn," he repeated softly, his conscious mind cycling like a broken record as he unthinkingly did each job necessary for getting underway.

The diesel of the 44 caught with a protesting roar, heat vapor rolling in clouds from the open engineroom hatch as Chipps scuttled aft to throw off the stern line. Jackson backed the rocking crashboat into the bay until she was clear of the dock, then pegged the throttles down full, the sleek white vessel straining through the high chop toward the harbor entrance. Behind in the galley door, Mac, Bear and the two seamen stood, watching them go, like

some pioneer family silhouetted by the wagon train's campfire. Thank you, oh Lord, for sending the other guy.

"44324, how do you read?"

Jackson thumbed the mike button, trying to sound cheerful. "You are well-read, Fred, over."

Fred's voice came back in tense, formal tones.

"Switch to 31 Freq for Operational."

Operational was lingo for Instructions. Instructions? I give the instructions on this boat, but he did as requested. Thirty-one was a new channel: directional and tight-beam, which meant no listeners and maximum security.

"44324 on 31, go."

"Roger, 24, this is Fairhaven. Due to the nature of this operation, we've got to do things a bit differently. Therefore, all identification of this unit will be 'Base.' All identification of your unit will be 'Catcher.' All identification of target objective will be 'Pop-up.'"

"How about Pop-up's crew?"

"Um ... 'Team One,' 'Team Two,' et cetera, OK?"

"It's your ballgame, Base."

"Roger, Catcher. Sorry, Bob, them's the rules. Not my idea."

"I know. OK, Base, I've got the bar entrance coming up. I'll call you if we make it through."

"Roger, Catcher. Hals und Beinbruch."

"Thanks. Catcher, out."

Jackson strapped himself into the

pilot's chair, his feet jammed into the steady wells, and throttled back as they approached the first of the crashing bar combers. Chipps stuck his head up to look through the rotating Clearview, water frosting his blond mustache.

"Hey, Bob, what was that halsen bybrook business about? Some kinda good luck?"

"Yeah," Bob replied grimly, gritting his teeth as the first of the rollers struck the 44's port bow. "It's German for 'Break your neck and leg.'"

"Terrific."

The bar was always the worst part of any call, that no-man's-land, and they took it with all their lights lit and the horn blaring, on the off-chance that someone else might be using the channel. Also, Fred could see their lights from the tower.

In a narrow channel bar like Humboldt, waves break and come up the chute like the hills of a roller coaster. On good days, that is. On such days a boat can climb those hills like the little engine that could, until it gains the relative security of the open sea. Coming in, you regulate the throttle so that the waves don't get a chance to curl over your stern. As long as you keep power and don't broach broadside into a wave, you're OK. During storms, all bets are off.

Waves not only barrel up the channel, breaking as they come, but they set up calf waves which move at 45-de-

gree angles, caroming off the jetty walls and pushing the boat from side to side, throwing up blinding geysers of spray when they hit. It takes a good hand to countersteer the effects of the pounding in daytime, just to keep off the breakwaters, great interlocked concrete caltrops, each weighing a ton. At night it also needs luck, divine intervention and, ideally, tranquilizers. Coast Guard rescue boats are usually the only ones fool enough to try, and they don't always come back. All this was on Bob's mind as they barreled through the first wave.

I've got a wife, he thought. Chipps has a wife and kid. This is crazy. The radio aerials whipped and snapped as waves marched into the side of the boat, throwing Beller to the deck. "Strap down, damn it!" Chipps grabbed Beller and pulled him to his feet, the two of them huddling by the engineroom door. The boat suddenly ran out of water and dropped, Jackson screaming "Yaaaaa," lifting his butt off the chair before the impact, Chipps and Beller up on their toes, knees bent. The engine coughed and raced but hung on as another wave struck the bow, carrying away the RDF loop and the port aerial. The 44 lurched and rolled, water pouring across the well deck, as a large roller crashed over the port side. With a yelp, Chipps vanished overboard, connected only by his safety line. Beller screamed and struggled to pull him aboard, the monstrous concrete jacks of the north breakwater

passing within three yards of the churning props. The pilothouse passed between the twin steel towers, each supporting a light marking the end of the channel, and Jackson thought, we're going to make it. Then he saw the wave.

Towering four times higher than the wallowing boat, the wave rolled toward them with majestic slowness. It humped and curled, not yet breaking, as the 44 slipped down the side of an angled comber, Jackson fighting to keep its nose straight. He had only seen waves like this a few times and only once, as a green boat seaman in 1975, gone through one. It was in the approach to Coos Bay. Their boat, a forty-footer, had been moving out at full speed in response to a fire at sea when one of those giants had risen up out of the fog. They had seen it for three or four very long seconds, and then it had fallen on them, crushing the steel cabin and driving the boat deep underwater. When the 40 had righted itself, the regular boat seaman was gone and the cox's'n, strapped into his chair, was dead of a broken neck, his lungs full of water. Jackson and the engineer had somehow gotten the boat home. The Guard had given him two weeks medical leave to straighten his head out, and he did, assuming that he'd had his wave and there was no sense worrying about it. Now it was back.

"Beller!"

Beller stuck his head up.

"How's Chipps?"

"He's a little shook but he's OK. You?"

"I'm fine. I want you and Chipps to get into the after turtle, tie down and stay there till I get you."

Beller saw the great silent wave, looming in the jetty lights. He hauled the stunned Chipps to his feet.

"What about you?"

"I'll be OK. Go."

Beller dragged Chipps toward the stern, and Jackson heard the door open and close. The steel storage compartment was watertight and would protect them as long as they held on. The boat was designed to come to the surface no matter what you did to it, and if he was injured or killed, they could take over. He braced himself on the pilot's chair and gunned up the engines.

Climbing the wave straight-on was the best way, if it worked; but if the wave curled too high or the boat's diesel couldn't make the grade (literally), it would flip the 44 end over end, break her back and explode the engine. Chipps and Beller might escape later, but he wouldn't have a prayer. He could attempt to tack up the face of the slow-rolling monster and swing across its crest, but again, if it peaked too high or it broke, the boat would roll on its beam ends. One roll it could take. He'd been rolled himself in a 36 and had been OK. But two rolls would kill the engine, and no 44 had ever survived three rolls without the diesel

mounting blocks tearing loose; the same result as trying to climb it head on. And he couldn't burrow under it. A wave that big was too heavy. By the time the crushed boat came up, he'd be drowned. And he couldn't even run because, even if he did catch it just right, it'd surf him back down the channel into the bay and probably halfway through the town of Fields Landing on the other side.

The engine ground and caught as the water was sucked forward to join the wave, the 44 racing toward it. He put the wheel hard over and shot diagonally up the face, swearing, gripping the wheel with one hand and an elbow as he fumbled with the transmitter key.

"Mayday, Mayday," he screamed. "Tidal bore in excess of forty feet moving toward Fields Landing. Mayday..."

White water rushed toward him and he saw that the monster was beginning to break above him as the 44 climbed its heaving face. He dropped the mike and hauled on the wheel with both hands, struggling to turn it into the peak before the wave took him over. There was an endless moment as the boat teetered near the brink and Jackson threw his shoulder against the throttle.

"Go, you bitch! Go! Catch, catch, don't miss, please..."

The stern began to lift, but just before the props rose clear of the water's tractive pull, the 44324 tilted forward and plunged into the breaking wave. The lights and radar, Clearview

screen, windshield and aerials were torn away as the wave smashed through the boat, hammering Jackson's chest and rising above his gasping mouth.

Inhale, close your mouth and don't panic, he told himself as the water closed over his head. There's enough air in the engineroom to keep the diesel running as long as I can hold my breath. He heard the water pressure close the air intakes. Go, go, churned the engine, Yaaaa....

Like an air-filled rubber toy held under the surface of a pool and released, the 44 shot up into the night, breaking the surface, the engine grinding, coughing and dying. Jackson was gasping, listening to the storm, the boat dead and drifting but safe, and alive.

They neither heard nor saw the shuttle pass over in the storm, and the radios were out, but they continued to plough on toward the sea's invisible coordinates. After all, there was no sense in going back. There was nothing that the shattered boat and its crew could contribute to whatever was being done at Fields Landing, assuming that Fields Landing was still there.

Beller had bandaged Jackson's face where the disintegrating windshield had hit it, furrowing his left cheek and tearing a gash in his forehead. The two men in the after turtle had been bounced around but had emerged intact, finding Jackson sitting calmly in his seat, the blood running down his face.

"Boy, I must look stupid," was all he had said.

Beller had sent Chipps up forward, gotten the engines restarted, and now, radar blind and radio deaf, they were pushing on through the diminishing rain, navigating by the magnetic compass. The stocky engineer came up out of the boat's tiny galley with a cup of hot coffee for Jackson. It was pure ambrosia in the cold spray, and it dropped into the center of his body, reactivating his system like the lights on a pinball machine.

"Thanks, Tom."

"Sure." Beller glanced out at the eight-foot rollers and the stinging spray.

"Bob, this is crazy."

"Ummm?"

"No shuttle could stay afloat in this. They're bricks with wings. Both the Enterprises and the Kearsarges, they're too damned heavy."

"Maybe it's a newer one."

Beller shook his head. "There are no newer ones, not yet. There was a third series, but Larry says they aren't even off the boards yet."

Jackson tensed as a wave smacked up under the bow, making Chipps stumble and sway, his hands locked to the safety rail.

"Then we look for the pilots."

"In this wind?"

"They gonna blow away?"

Beller turned away angrily. Got to watch that, Jackson thought. We're all pretty touchy.

"I mean, it could be your brother out there."

"Yeah, I guess it could. It's not though. He's down at Mendocino, training new pilots."

Jackson sat quietly for a moment. "How's Chipps?"

Beller shrugged.

"I think he's in some kind of shock. You'd better keep him busy."

Jackson remembered how Cernik, the engineman at Coos Bay, had been after they had brought the 40-boat in: the same distraction, detachment, as though he was wrestling with the unexplainable. And after his medical leave he seemed OK, but he wasn't any good on the boats after that. He'd been spooked, broken and he wound up finishing his hitch on big cutters and shore stations. He hoped that wouldn't happen to Chipps.

"Yeah ... Tom? Thanks."

"Forget it."

**T**he wind had blown the seas flat, and as dawn came up over Cape Mendocino, they arrived at the shuttle's plotted position. It had taken them a little over three hours. Chipps was down below, where Jackson had put him to work splicing together a new aerial, and Beller had the con. Jackson was sitting up on the ruins of the bridge roof with binoculars. At least the rain had stopped.

They call them spaceships. Jackson wondered how far the analogy went.



Did they have storms out there? Did they have tidal bores, reefs, breaker lines, tsunamis, seasickness? Space-sickness from being weightless, he supposed. Did they have long hours, bad food, substandard equipment, low pay, and that terrible fear of being overmatched in a game against the elements? Did their wives sink into depression when the storms came up, and were there widow's walks for them to prowl while the men were gone? And did they sometimes not come back? Yes, he supposed they didn't.

He scanned in toward the coast, looking for telltale wreckage and finding none. Beller had taken them in toward the beach, so he could get a good look, but was being careful to keep them out of the breaker line.

"Know what's weird about this, Bob?"

"Tell me one thing that isn't."

"Shuttles landing at Edwards these days usually come in on a straight glide out of orbit. They come in from east to west and drop right in on that big five-mile runway at Pancho's Flat."

"Yeah?"

"So, if they come in from east to west, what's one doing up here, almost 900 miles north of the approach line?"

"Yeah," Jackson replied lowering his glasses. "If it overshot, it should be in the ocean off of L.A., not up here."

"Well," he said at last. "It's not up here either. Head her south along the driftline. We'll take her down about

ten miles. Even with this storm, she couldn't have drifted more than eight."

There was no way the shuttle could have stayed afloat, but Jackson found her, and she was, right where she had to be, two miles dead south of the Blunts Reef buoy. The wind was still gusting up, but the sea was relatively flat, and the spray was leaping off the shuttle like smoke in a grass fire. The wind was at their backs now, but the return trip would be brutal. Jackson hoped that the *Cherokee* was getting close. They'd have no trouble getting a line on the thing, but the 44 had never towed such an unwieldy object. It would be interesting.

"She's black," Beller exclaimed, as they approached.

"So!"

"So look, no marking at all." Beller took the glasses and studied the hulk. "It's the third series all right. It has to be. It's not a Kearsarge, it's smaller. And there's a name, in dark red, under the cabin windows. *Devastator*."

"*Devastator*? I thought they named them after ships."

Beller grunted. "Sort of, ships and national symbols, like Eagle. Was there a ship named *Devastator*?"

Bob had a chill feeling at the base of his spine.

"No, but there was a bomber."

Chipps came up from below, wiping his hands on an oily rag. "Try the radio."

Jackson kicked the radio in and got

a mess of static, which began to level off. "Good going, Matt."

"You found it?" Then: "A black shuttle?"

"That's what we said."

The shuttle rocked in the gently pitching sea, spray flying up off the control surfaces as the wind-blown water caught them, shrouding the black ship in a permanent mist. Jackson took over the con as Beller fiddled with the radio.

"Come in, Base, this is Catcher. Base, this is Catcher, over."

"Go, Catcher, this is Base. We were getting worried about you."

"Roger, Base. Our radio was out. How are you, over?"

"We're OK, but the Landing caught it pretty badly. We got your warning but it didn't ... it wasn't very early. We've got units on the scene. What's your status and position, over?"

Chiggs had climbed up on the bow and was signaling.

"There's someone coming out of the top hatch, Bob."

"Base, wait one..."

He put down the mike and concentrated on getting the 44 in closer. A figure in a silver flight suit had pulled himself up onto the lip of the hatch and was waving. Chiggs leaned over the bow as they closed.

"Bob, I think we can almost ground her on the leading edge of the wing, if you wanted to risk it." Jackson gauged the distance, sweating the possibilities. Would the weight sink the shuttle? Could his own craft get hung up? He

eased in closer and signaled Beller to take the mike.

"Tell them what we're doing and ask them to stand by."

"Base, this is Catcher. We have Pop-up in sight and are going in on approach. Please stand by."

"Roger, Catcher. Good job," came Fred's easy drawl.

The shuttle crewman sported a gash across the forehead but otherwise looked unhurt. He made unnecessary distancing motions as Jackson eased and backed the 44 in at the point where the port wing joined the fuselage.

"I think we can tow off the hatch combing," Beller ventured.

"You're the expert." Beller nodded, grinning. This was turning out well, worth what they'd gone through.

"But we'll have to fill the hatch with something to keep the water out."

"How about the inflatable raft?" Chiggs asked. "We wedge it in the opening and pop the gas bottle. That'll keep it watertight."

"Good thinking," Jackson called, and good for you, Matt. You're going to be all right.

"Will she go if I ground on your wing?" Jackson called. The man shook his head.

"If she hasn't sunk by now, she won't." His voice was precise, with no regional accent. Somehow, having read Tom Wolfe, he expected that the man would have a Chuck Yeager Appalachian drawl, but the voice was technical and colorless.

"How's your crew?"

"There were just two of us. The pilot didn't make it. Killed on impact. You got a body bag or something?"

"Cold bastard," Beller said softly.

"Leave him there," Jackson called.

"Get ready to transfer across. My seaman will help you aboard, and then we'll get a line on your ship."

"Whatever you say."

The copilot's name was Luther, Jonathan T., Lieutenant Colonel, U.S.A.F., and he gave it that way, as if he'd been taken prisoner. The Coast Guard doesn't take prisoners, Jackson thought. We bury them at sea.

Chipps made the *Devastator* fast to the towline, popped the life raft open and scurried back, as Jackson payed out a hundred and fifty feet of nylon hawser. These things weren't designed to float; so let's see how they tow. The wind had dropped away; the *Devastator* was wallowing behind them, and Beller had passed around coffee to crew and supercargo, who had wrapped a blanket around his flight suit and was watching the black shuttle ploughing along at the end of her line. Only after the operation was completed and Chipps was on the con, did Jackson allow himself to relax and contact the station.

"Base, Catcher here. We have Pop-up in tow, over."

"Roger that, how about Team?"

"Team One is no-go. Team Two is aboard, do you copy?"

"Roger that. Good going, Bob. Uh ... stand by."

"Roger."

Jackson took his coffee from Beller, then told him to go below and get some rest. The engines echoed the subtle changes Chipps was using to keep the towline taut but not strained, and he heard them with half an ear as he watched the sun coming up above the cliffs at Cape Mendocino. It was beautiful like this, even after the night they'd had, wrestling with the gods of the sea and air and he hoped the bar would be down when he tried to pull the *Devastator* through it later. They might have to drift it in first and play drag anchor behind it or, if it was too rough, float it in on the beach across from the station and let the Air Force salvage it from there. Or, rather, NASA. The pilot was Air Force.

He stood by the towing reel, watching the *Devastator's* black hulk wallowing along behind them.

"You missed the runway."

Luther smiled a brief smile, then filed it away. "We had trouble with the guidance package ... had to put it down on short notice, I'm afraid."

"Couldn't make Pancho's Flat, huh?"

Luther's eyebrows went up. "How'd you know about that?"

"It's not secret, is it?"

"No. Just new."

"My engineer's brother is a shuttle pilot. Larry Beller."

Luther nodded, weariness implicit

in the gesture. For a second he almost acted human, and Jackson realized he was finding it difficult to like this cold fish.

"I met Larry a coupla times. He's a good pilot." Luther looked about him at the boat, as if for the first time. "You took a lot of damage. Getting here?"

Jackson nodded.

"Sorry about that. No, we couldn't make the Flat."

"I would have thought you'd put her down farther south, off L.A."

"Couldn't," Luther sighed. "Too risky."

"Why?"

Luther smiled bleakly. "Sorry, Chief, that's restricted."

"Catcher, this is Base."

"Wait one." Chipps turned and handed the mike to Bob.

"Base, this is Catcher, go ahead please."

The voice was older and tired, the voice Jackson had heard on the Watts phone.

"Catcher, this is Coach, over."

Jackson looked at Luther, who was watching him, and noted that the man was not wearing a sidearm. Don't get paranoid, he told himself. He's only a downed flier.

"Catcher, go."

"Catcher, you've done a magnificent job, all of you. We frankly didn't think that you could accomplish what you have thus far, and our admiration for you is the highest. We'll be putting you and your crew in for commenda-

tions, Chief. Over."

"Thank you, sir," Jackson replied, wondering what the hell was up. Beller had come topside and was standing by Chipps. Luther had moved in a step, all of them listening intently. Did they know? Were they too waiting for the other shoe to drop?

"That's all right, Chief, but now we've got one more instruction. We ask that you carry it out without question or comment. You are to cut Pop-up loose and sink her, do you understand?"

There was silence while they all digested the statement, and Jackson knew that at least three of them were suddenly out of their depth. Completely.

"Negative, Coach, I do not understand. Neither does my crew," Jackson replied, anger edging into his voice. "I think you've got the wrong service. We save ships. You want the Navy."

"I understand how you feel, Chief. I cannot tell you the reason for these orders. I cannot even tell you why I cannot, but you must comply, immediately."

"Wait one," Jackson replied, and turned on Luther.

"All right, pilot, suppose you tell us what's going on."

"I can't."

"You will, or we won't," Jackson said with sudden vehemence.

Luther's eyes were cold and he shook his head. "Suppose you obey orders, Chief, or you'll all find your-

selves in Portsmouth Naval Prison for about twenty years."

Chippis looked at Jackson, scared, but Beller put a hand on his arm.

"Bob, I think that this survivor is deranged from his ordeal with the sea. I doubt that anything he says will carry that much weight."

"That's right," Jackson said with a grin, shaking his head. "I'm senior officer in charge of rescue operations on the scene. Regulations state that, unless I am relieved by another qualified officer, the burden of decision is mine ... sir."

"Now look..."

"No, you look. I get a voice on the radio telling me to do something which goes against seventeen years of training. I have no confirmation that this voice on the radio is genuine. He hasn't even identified himself. Before I sink a billion-dollar piece of U.S. Government hardware, I'm going to know why. What are you carrying aboard that the Air Force would rather lose than have discovered?"

Luther turned pale but said nothing. The radio call-light was clicking furiously.

"Now, you can either talk, right now, or my engineer can make a reconnaissance of your craft. He knows exactly how they're built, and he won't miss a trick. So you better decide. Quickly!" he roared.

Luther looked from man to man, his career dissolving before him. Both Chippis and Beller were backing their

skipper. He swallowed, hard.

"Why do you have to know?"

"Because this is my boat and I risked my life and the lives of these men last night, for that shuttle. So I can sleep at night, knowing I did the right thing. The Guard trained me to save lives and property, and it's been straight by me. I want to return the favor."

"How about what's-best for your country?"

Jackson gave a short, ugly laugh and snapped, "Like Vietnam and El Salvador? You tell me and I'll decide if it's best."

"I can't."

Beller turned on the pilot.

"All right, suppose we do this another way. I ask a few questions, and you nod if I'm on the right track, OK?"

Luther stood motionless.

"I think there's only one reason they'd drop a shuttle up here, instead of off L.A. Too many people. Whatever you're carrying is dangerous enough that they were afraid of wiping out Los Angeles. So they decided to drop it up here in the Humboldt country, where it'd only kill fifty or sixty thousand, didn't they?"

Beller was trying to keep his voice level, but the words hammered at Luther, who made no denial, standing tight-lipped and grey-faced. Beller looked at Jackson and nodded.

"Bob knows by now, don't you Bob, but I've known for some time.

Larry never could keep his mouth shut. That thing is what's called a platform. They've got a load of nuclear weapons aboard, in violation of the treaties, the ones that ban atoms in space. And if the Soviets found out, it could trigger a war. Oh, you stupid bastards! You pitiful, stupid bastards!"

"Your brother's in big shit, sailor, and so are you. We have laws about letting secrets go in this country," Luther snarled.

"My brother never told me anything," Beller replied heatedly, "but you just did."

"Jesus," Chipps muttered.

"I figured you clowns would pull this sooner or later. I'll bet that black-paint job is that radar-invisible stuff they developed for bombers. You stupid bastards. Did you think you could go heaving H-bombs into orbit and keep it a secret?"

Jackson was stunned and angry. It was the same feeling he'd felt in high school when he'd learned about Watergate, the same anger he'd experienced when his first wife had left him. He'd been betrayed by someone he trusted.

"How'd you know, Tom?"

"I didn't. I guessed, but hell, it's obvious. The shuttles were designed originally to military specs. The Air Force has never made any great secret about wanting to use them as bombers. If it wasn't nukes, it'd be germ bombs."

"Neat trick, Tom."

"Yeah, I just watch a lot of movies. So what do we do now?"

Jackson's brain was working at flank speed. If we bring the pilot in (my God, I'm considering murder) and he talks, what's he going to say? That he told us the big secret? He can't say anything. But what about the Air Force? How much do they think we might know? How much could we have figured out ourselves? Will they suspect Beller's brother and put him under surveillance? Will we be under surveillance? Interrogation? Jail? He looked at the black pig ploughing along behind them, carrying God knew how much death, and reached for the mike, but before he thumbed it, he pointed a finger at Luther. To his surprise, it was shaking.

"This is our secret, pilot, and don't you ever forget."

Luther stood frozen, like a cold corpse, then slowly nodded. Beller muttered "Jesus" and went up forward with the binoculars.

"...ahead, Base, this is Catcher," Jackson said, trying to simulate a faulty mike. "Roger your last. We've been having communications problems out here. Where you want us to dump it?"

There was a pause while this was being digested. Jackson watched the *Devastator*, held motionless behind them as Chipps gave the 44 just enough engine to cancel out the drift and keep the towline tight. Luther stood off to one side, a discarded toy pilot. He's had his wave and he's blown it, Jackson thought, but there was no sympathy in it.

"Catcher, what's the fathometer reading your position, over?"

Fred knew the 44s had no echo-ranging gear. Wants us to look good in front of the Air Force. Bob estimated the course and distance to the Blunts Reef buoy and replied.

"Right over the Blunts Valley. One-eight-oh fathoms, over.

Air Force came back on the line, trying not to sound impatient. The storm would have stirred up the bottom and the dragboats would be showing up soon, eager for the fish the weather would bring.

"Very good, Catcher. We're going to ask you to hold it there until I give the word, then cut it lose and move out of the area. We'll take care of the actual job, over."

How? Remote control?

"Coach, this is Catcher. We will comply, just give us the word, over."

"Catcher, you'll be seeing them any moment. As soon as you do, cut and run. And thanks, Chief."

"Roger, Coach. Base, Catcher

standing by." Jackson grabbed his binoculars and began to scan the horizon astern. The air bases were all to the south, and they'd have put a flight in the air as soon as the weather had cleared enough for a safe scramble.

The sun was over the Cape now, throwing almost painful reflections off the spray, and the sea was serene and innocent again, ready to be fished or painted. Then Beller saw them.

"Coming in, Bob."

The two strike fighters, like tiny versions of the *Devastator*, crossed over the tow from northwest to southeast, low enough and loud enough to make the four of them duck. The planes pulled out over the coast and climbed.

"Base, Catcher. Cutting loose."

"Roger, Catcher."

Jackson took the fireaxe from its cradle and looked at Luther.

"You want to cut it loose? It's your ship?" But Luther turned away.

"Matt, give me strain."

Chippis kicked in the throttles, the

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boat surged ahead, and the nylon towline began to stretch. Jackson looked to see where the planes were, but he couldn't find them. So he set his feet and squared off with the axe.

When he hit the towing bit, the line let go with a cannon crack, and the 44 began pulling away, leaving the *Devastator* to disappear in the cold blue currents behind them, alone with its dead pilot. Why are you leaving us, they seemed to say, and Jackson had a terrible moment of despair and anger, as if things would never again be the same. He quickly put down the axe.

"Here they come."

It was a masterpiece of precision flying. The two planes swooped in off the Cape, set right down on the deck and throttled back. Then, as slow as they could fly, they ran in, side by side, pumping cannon shells into the cockpit. Glistening innards, black metal and plexiglass erupted from the stricken shuttle; hydrogen peroxide escaped in a geyser of steam, and the

oxygen blew up with a muffled whump. *Devastator's* nose pitched forward. It hung head-down for a moment, then rolled over and went under. Just like that, a megabuck spaceship that should never have flown. Luther sighed and sat down on the useless towing reel.

"So, Chief," he said tonelessly. "We have a deal?"

Jackson nodded.

"Chipps, I'll take over. You and Tom get some sleep."

He stretched and groaned, the weariness pouring through his body, eddying around the denials he had set up so that he could keep functioning. He tried to shake it off and it retreated. It would give him another few hours on the wheel.

They would go home now, to whatever was waiting, whatever had risen out of this incident to plague them. They would go home and play at being heroes, but he felt like something else entirely.

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# Science

ISAAC ASIMOV

Drawing by Gahan Wilson

## FOUR HUNDRED OCTAVES

I have trouble describing my sense of humor, except by use of the adjective "puckish," which is derived from the description of Puck's practical jokes, in Act II, scene i, of *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*.

My dear wife, Janet, on the other hand, is inclined to use the adjective "perverted," instead, and many a time and oft I have recognized that one of my remarks has hit home because of Janet's cry of "Oh, Isaac!"

As a matter of fact, I hear that cry from others as well. The only person with whom I am safe in this respect is my beautiful blonde-haired, blue-eyed daughter (who now lives in New Jersey, with her master's degree in social work nicely framed). She never says "Oh, Isaac!" She wouldn't dream of it. What she says is, "Oh, Dad!"

Other remarks are harder to take.

One time, two of our very dearest friends were coming on a visit, and Janet, cocking an eye at the clock, said, "I do wish, Isaac, that you would take out the garbage before Phyllis and Al arrive."

"Certainly, dear," said I, all compliance. I gathered up the garbage container, opened the door, stepped out into the corridor; and there were

Phyllis and Al coming toward me, big grins on their faces, arms outstretched in greeting. And there was I, laden with garbage.

I had to pass it off with some off-the-cuff witticism, so I said, "Hi! I just said to Janet that you two were about to arrive and that seemed to remind her that I ought to take out the garbage."

And two things happened. The first (quite expected) was Janet's anguished cry from within the apartment, "Oh, *Isaac!*" ringing out simultaneously with an identical cry from Phyllis.

The second was Al's jovial laugh, as he said, "Don't worry about it, Janet. Nobody takes Isaac seriously."

Imagine! Here I go to enormous trouble writing very serious essays in every issue of F&SF, and he attacks my credibility just because of my bubbling, irrepressible jocosity.

Fortunately, I know that all my Gentle Readers take me seriously indeed, and so I will continue with the subject broached in last month's essay.

Last month, I talked about the spectrum of visible light and of the fact that William Herschel discovered, in 1800, that there was invisible light beyond the red end of the spectrum, light we now call "infrared radiation." The Solar spectrum contains one octave of visible light, stretching from a frequency of 800 trillion cycles per second at the shortest-wave violet, to one of 400 trillion cycles per second at the longest-wave red. Beyond the red in the Solar spectrum are two octaves of infrared radiation, extending down to a frequency of 100 trillion cycles per second.

But if there is something beyond the red, might there not be something beyond the violet as well?

That part of the story begins in 1614, when an Italian chemist, Angelo Sala (1576-1637), reported that silver nitrate, a perfectly white compound, darkened on exposure to the Sun.

This happens to other silver compounds as well and, nowadays, we know what happens. Silver is not a very active element, and it does not hold on to other atoms particularly tightly. The molecules of a compound, such as silver nitrate or silver chloride, can easily be broken apart and, when that happens, very fine granules of metallic silver are deposited here and there among the tiny crystals of the compound. Finely divided silver happens to be black, so the compound darkens.

Light-waves radiated by the Sun contain enough energy to split the molecules of silver compounds, and so light will darken them. This sort of thing is an example of a "photochemical reaction."

About 1770, the Swedish chemist Carl Wilhelm Scheele (1742-1786) studied the effect of Sunlight on silver compounds, and he had the Solar spectrum available to him (which Sala had not had). Scheele soaked thin strips of paper in solutions of silver nitrate and placed them in different parts of the spectrum. It was clear that the colors were more effective in darkening the compound as he approached the violet end of the spectrum.

This is no surprise today, of course, since we know that the energy of light goes up with frequency. Naturally, the higher the energy of a particular type of light, the greater the likelihood of that type of light breaking the chemical bonds within a molecule.

But then, in 1800, Herschel discovered infrared radiation. It occurred to a German chemist, Johann Wilhelm Ritter (1776-1810), that there might well be something beyond the other end of the spectrum, and he set about checking the matter.

In 1801, he soaked strips of paper in a solution of silver nitrate, as Scheele had done thirty years before. Ritter, however, placed strips *beyond* the violet, too, in a region where no light was visible. It was with considerable satisfaction that he found, and reported, that darkening proceeded fastest in that apparently lightless region.

At first the spectral region beyond the violet was referred to as "chemical rays," because the only way it could be studied was through its photochemical properties.

Those very photochemical properties, however, led to the development of photography. Silver compounds were mixed with a gelatinous material which was then smeared over a glass plate and enclosed in a dark box. Bright light was allowed to enter the box for a short period of time and was focused on the gelatinous material by way of a lens. Wherever the light struck, there would be darkening, so that a photographic negative was produced. From this, a photographic positive could be produced which could be treated chemically so that the pattern of light and dark was permanently fixed.

Soon after the French inventor Louis J. M. Daguerre (1789-1851) produced the first barely-practical photographic process in 1839, it was seized upon by scientists to record observations involving light.

In 1842, for instance, the French physicist Alexandre Edmond Becquerel (1820-1891) took the first successful photograph of the Solar spectrum.

The eye, as it happens, can see just those frequencies of light that produce appropriate photochemical changes in the retina, that is, light with frequencies ranging from 800 trillion to 400 trillion cycles per second. The

camera, on the other hand, can detect those frequencies of light that produce chemical breakdowns and darkening in the silver compounds on the photographic plate. Since light is less energetic the shorter the frequency, the camera can barely see red light, which is easily visible to the eye, and cannot see infrared radiation at all, any more than the eye can.

Beyond the violet, however, where the frequencies are higher still and the energies greater, the silver compounds break down quickly, so that the camera can see the region beyond the violet easily, even though the human eye cannot. Becquerel succeeded in photographing the Solar spectrum beyond the violet and showed quite plainly that the spectrum was a continuous structure, substantially wider than was optically visible. The region beyond the violet even contained spectral lines, exactly as the visible region did.

From then on, it became customary to speak of the region beyond the violet as consisting of "ultraviolet radiation," the prefix "ultra-" being Latin for "beyond."

In 1852, the Irish physicist George Gabriel Stokes (1819-1903) discovered that quartz is far more transparent to ultraviolet radiation than ordinary glass is. He therefore constructed prisms and lenses of quartz and found he could photograph a longer stretch of ultraviolet in the Solar spectrum than could be photographed through glass.

It turned out that the Solar spectrum contained a stretch of ultraviolet radiation from the 400-nanometer wavelength of the shortest-wave violet down to about 300 nanometers. This amounts to just under half an octave of ultraviolet, from a frequency of 800 trillion to 1000 trillion cycles per second.

The Solar spectrum contained, therefore, 1 octave of visible light, sandwiched between 2 octaves of infrared radiation, and not quite 1/2 octave of ultraviolet radiation.

The absence of any farther stretch of ultraviolet turned out to be a good thing. Light produces photochemical changes in the skin, and does so the more effectively as the frequency increases. Visible light does little, but ultraviolet darkens the skin by stimulating the production of the dark pigment, melanin. If a particular skin is fair and isn't much good at producing melanin (mine, for instance), it reddens and burns instead. If the Solar spectrum extended beyond the 1000 trillion per second mark in frequency, the changes in living tissue would be more extensive and might actually preclude the existence of life that was exposed to Sunlight.

\* \* \*

The Solar spectrum, then, includes radiation in the frequency range from 1000 trillion cycles per second for the shortest ultraviolet to 100 trillion per second for the longest infrared. There are three questions we might now ask:

1) Is that all there is? Is it impossible for there to be radiation of higher frequencies than 1000 trillion, or lower than 100 trillion cycles per second?

2) If higher and lower are indeed possible, why do they not show up in the Solar spectrum? Is the Sun incapable of producing those very high and very low frequencies or are they produced but, for some reason, failing to reach us?

3) And if there are very high and very low frequencies possible, then how high and how low? Are there any limits at all?

The first question was quickly answered, since scientists had no trouble producing ultraviolet radiation that was higher-frequency and infrared radiation that was lower-frequency than anything in the Solar spectrum.

Stokes himself used an electric spark as a source of high-frequency radiation. The sparks emitted light that was richer in ultraviolet than Sunlight was, and higher-frequency ultraviolet, too.

Stokes and other physicists of his time were able to follow ultraviolet down to a wavelength of 200 nanometers, which is equivalent to a frequency of about 1500 trillion per second. That gave them just about a full octave of ultraviolet.

In the 20th Century, advances in photographic technology made it possible to go beyond the 200-nanometer mark in wavelength, even down to 10 nanometers. The frequency region from 800 trillion to 1500 trillion cycles per second is sometimes called the "near ultraviolet," while the region from 1500 trillion up to as far as 30,000 trillion cycles per second is called the "far ultraviolet."

Where infrared radiation was concerned, it became possible to observe and study low-energy radiation emitted by heated bodies that produced frequencies of infrared radiation far lower than the 100 trillion per second that seemed the limit in the Solar spectrum. Eventually, waves approaching 1 millimeter (that is, 1,000,000 nanometers) were observed, and 1 millimeter can be taken as the limiting wavelength of infrared. This represents a frequency of 0.3 trillion (or 300 billion) cycles per second.

The spectrum would seem to stretch, then, from frequencies as little as 0.3 trillion to as much as 30,000 trillion cycles per second in frequency (or from  $3 \times 10^{11}$ /second to  $3 \times 10^{16}$ /second). This is a total range of over 16 octaves. Of these, 5 octaves are ultraviolet radiation, 1 octave is visible light,

and 10 are infrared radiation. The invisible light outweighs the visible by a factor of 15.

Now to the second question. Why is the Solar spectrum more limited in both directions than is the radiation which can be studied in the laboratories? Scientists didn't really think the Solar spectrum was as limited as it appeared to be, and investigation of the upper atmosphere during the early 20th Century made it clear they were right.

The atmosphere is opaque to most radiation outside the visible octave. Ozone, in which the upper atmosphere is rich, blocks the shorter range of ultraviolet radiation. The longer range of infrared radiation is absorbed by various atmospheric components such as carbon dioxide and water vapor.

If Sunlight could be studied outside the atmospheric blanket of Earth, it would surely be found to have a spectrum that included the full range of ultraviolet and infrared radiation, and probably beyond that on either side. By mid-20th Century, Sunlight *was* so studied and was found indeed to be very wide-spectrum.

That brings us to the third question. Are there absolute limits to radiation in either direction? Are there radiations with a longest possible and shortest possible wavelength, or (the equivalent) a lowest possible and highest possible frequency?

An approach to an answer to that originated in the study of electricity and magnetism.

These were originally thought to be two independent phenomena but, in 1820, the Danish physicist Hans Christian Oersted (1777-1851) discovered, rather by accident, that an electric current produced a magnetic field that could affect the needle of a magnetic compass.

Other physicists immediately began to investigate this surprising state of affairs, and it was quickly found that if a conductor cut through the lines of force of a magnetic field, a current of electricity could be induced in that conductor (the foundation of our modern electrified society).

In fact, the further research went, the more intimately electricity and magnetism seemed to be related. It began to be suspected that one could not exist without the other — that there was not an electric field and a magnetic field, but a combined "electromagnetic field."

In 1864, the Scottish mathematician James Clerk Maxwell (1831-1879) devised a set of four comparatively simple equations that described, with surprising accuracy, the full behavior of electromagnetic phenomena, and these set the notion of the electromagnetic field on a lastingly firm foundation.

Thus, the two great physical revolutions of the 20th Century, relativity and quanta, modified nearly everything in classical physics, even Isaac Newton's theory of gravitation — but they left Maxwell's equations untouched.

The most unexpected result of the equations was that Maxwell was able to show that an electric field of changing intensity had to produce a magnetic field of changing intensity, which in turn produced an electric field of changing intensity and so on. The two effects leap-frogged, so to speak, and produced a radiation that had the properties of a transverse wave and spread outward in all directions equally. It was like dropping a pebble on the surface of a still pond, setting up a series of ripples spreading outward in all directions from the center of disturbance.

In the case of an electromagnetic field, the result is "electromagnetic radiation."

Maxwell was able to work out the speed of propagation of such electromagnetic radiation from his equations. It turned out to be equal to the ratio of certain values of his equations, and this ratio proved to be 300,000,000 metres per second.

This was precisely the speed of light, which also had the properties of a transverse wave. Maxwell could not believe that this was a coincidence. He assumed that light was an example of an electromagnetic radiation, and that its varying wavelengths depended on varying rates at which electromagnetic fields were oscillating.

What electromagnetic fields?

Maxwell couldn't say, but his equations worked and he was convinced the fields were there. It was not until well after his premature death that he was shown to be completely correct in this respect.

We now know that the atom consists of subatomic particles, two of which, the electron and the proton, are electrically-charged. They give rise to oscillating electromagnetic fields.

If we look at it in what modern physicists would call an unsophisticated manner, we could imagine electrons revolving about atomic nuclei, planet-fashion, and thus oscillating from one side of the nucleus to the other hundreds of trillions of times a second. The frequency of such an oscillation would equal the frequency of the light-wave inevitably produced. Different frequencies would arise from electrons of different atoms, or from different electrons of the same atoms, or even from the same electrons of the same atoms under different conditions.

Instead of speaking of a light-spectrum, then, we now speak of an "elec-

tromagnetic spectrum," and all the different frequencies in the spectrum reflect the different frequencies that can affect an oscillating electromagnetic field. There are therefore no fundamental distinctions between ultraviolet radiation, visible light, and infrared radiation. They represent a smooth continuum which is inevitably divided into three classes only through the accident that some frequencies, and not others, affect the chemicals in our retinas in such a way as to produce a sensation which our brains interpret as sight.

In theory, an electromagnetic field can oscillate at any frequency, so that electromagnetic radiation of any frequency can be produced. In particular, there seemed no theoretical reason why electromagnetic radiation with frequencies far lower than any of those in the infrared range might not be produced, or with frequencies far higher than any of those in the ultraviolet range.

Maxwell therefore predicted the existence of radiations outside (and even well-outside) the observed limits.

This prediction was proved correct just 24 years later, in 1888 (something I'll take up in next month's essay). Maxwell would have been 57 years old in that year and would have viewed the discovery with great satisfaction, but he had died prematurely, nine years before, of cancer.

For the remainder of the essay, let me speculate on reasonable limits for the electromagnetic spectrum in both directions.

As an electromagnetic field oscillates more and more slowly, the radiation produced is of lower and lower frequency and of longer and longer wavelength. If the oscillation is 300,000 cycles per second (rather than the hundreds of trillions required to produce light-waves) you would have each wave 1 kilometer long. If the oscillation were only 1 cycle per second, each wave would be 300,000 kilometers long, and so on.

To be sure, as the waves grow longer and longer, their energy content decreases, and it is easy to produce waves that are so long that no present-day instrumentation could detect them. We can always assume more and more delicate instruments, however, and ask whether we would ever reach a wavelength so long and non-energetic that no conceivable instrument would serve.

Suppose, then, we imagine an electromagnetic wave that is so long that one oscillation reaches across the full width of the Universe. Anything longer than that steps over the Universe, so to speak, and could not conceivably interact with anything in it, so that it could not be detected even in



principle. We will therefore take it that the width of the Universe is the longest wave-length any significant electromagnetic radiation could have.

I usually use the figure 25,000,000,000 light-years as the diameter of the Universe. (My good friend, John D. Clark, one-time science fiction writer, has recently argued that this is twice what it should be and he may be right, but let's stick with it for fun.) The rate of oscillation, producing a wave-length equal to the diameter of the Universe would then be 1 cycle per 25,000,000,000 years, or 1 cycle per 790,000,000,000,000,000 seconds. This is, roughly,  $10^{-18}$  cycles per second.

Next, suppose we go in the other direction and imagine wavelengths that are shorter and shorter and shorter and, therefore, frequencies (and energies) that are higher and higher and higher.

Here, it would seem, there should be no limit. The size of the Universe might well set an upper limit to length, but what could set a lower limit?

Thanks to quantum theory, we know that the higher the frequency, the higher the energy, and we can imagine an electromagnetic wave of frequency so high that it contains all the energy in the Universe. There can be no higher frequencies than that.

Almost all the energy in the Universe is in the form of mass. Suppose, then, we ignore the energy of the electromagnetic radiation that already exists, and the energy involved in the motions of mass. We can also ignore the possible rest-mass of the neutrinos, since this (see NOTHING AND ALL, February 1981) is still a very iffy thing.

Let us, then, make the reasonable guess that there are 100,000,000,000 galaxies in the Universe and that each galaxy possesses a mass equal to 100,000,000,000 times that of our Sun. (There are galaxies, including our own, that are considerably more massive than this; but there are also those that are considerably less massive.)

In that case, the mass of the Universe would be 10,000,000,000,000,000,000,000, or  $10^{22}$  times that of the Sun. Since the Sun's mass is just about  $2 \times 10^{30}$  kilograms, the mass of the Universe would be  $2 \times 10^{52}$  kilograms.

According to relativity theory,  $e = mc^2$ , where  $e$  is energy,  $m$  is mass, and  $c$  is the speed of light. According to quantum theory,  $e = hf$ , where  $h$  is Planck's constant, and  $f$  is frequency. (Actually, frequency is usually represented by the Greek letter "nu," but I do not wish to present problems for the Noble Printer.)

If we combine the two equations, we find that  $f = mc^2/h$ . Using the correct sets of units (trust me!) we can let  $m$  equal  $2 \times 10^{52}$ ,  $c^2$  equal  $9 \times 10^{16}$  and  $h$  equal  $6.6 \times 10^{-34}$ . Working out the equation, we find a frequency of

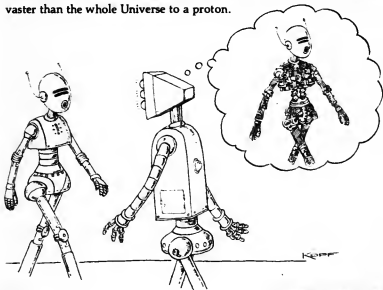
$2.7 \times 10^{102}$  cycles per second. The corresponding wavelength of radiation of such a frequency is  $10^{-94}$  meters.

The total range of electromagnetic radiation, then, is from  $10^{-18}$  cycles per second for a wave as long as the Universe is wide, to  $2.7 \times 10^{102}$  cycles per second for a wave so short as to contain the mass of the Universe. This is a range of 120 orders of magnitude. There are roughly 10 octaves to 3 orders of magnitude, so the full conceivable stretch of electromagnetic radiations is about 400 octaves.

Of these, there are just under 100 octaves beyond the infrared, and just under 300 octaves beyond the ultraviolet. The tiny band of ultraviolet visible light, and infrared covers 16 octaves in between and makes up 1/25 of the whole. Visible light, at 1 octave, makes up 1/400 of the whole.

It seems to me that at the time of the big bang, the Universe must have made its appearance as a single particle of nearly zero size and of Universal mass. I called such a particle a "holon" in THE CRUCIAL ASYMMETRY (November 1981), but Tom Easton, in the August 1979 issue of *Analog*, preceded me with a similar notion of what he called a "monobloc." Alas, I was unaware of that, and I cheerfully acknowledge his priority.

The diameter of the holon would then be  $10^{-94}$  meters. Compare this to a proton, which has a diameter of  $10^{-15}$  meters. The diameter of a proton is  $10^{79}$  times that of a holon, whereas the diameter of the Universe is  $10^{41}$  times that of a proton. To the holon, then, a proton would be far, far vaster than the whole Universe to a proton.



*In which freelance writer Jose Silvera returns from the Great Rain forest of Tarragon in search of the answers to several questions, one of which was why the guidebot had been secretly programmed to kill him. Naturally the first place a writer turns to for answers is his agent...*

# Blockbuster

BY

RON GOULART

**R**ain-drenched, clothes tattered, swarthy face bruised and scratched, Jose Silvera pushed through the plaz doors of the literary agency. The heavy slanting rain tried to follow him in from the twilight street. After shoving the licorice-tinted door tight shut with one broad shoulder, Silvera went tromping across the vast all-season carpet. He was a big, dark man in his early thirties, and there were jagged rents in the tunic and trousers of his 2-piece wildernesssuit. A fresh scar snaked up the part of his left arm which showed through a singe-rimmed hole in his sleeve, a fuzzy length of jungle vine was still twisted around one of his boots, green stains splotched his face and hands.

"You freelance writers," sighed the lovely blonde young woman behind the floating glaz desk. "What a life. Although I suppose it beats some means

of earning one's livelihood. Take my Uncle Noroton, for instance, who eked out a meager living as a guinea pig in a Rectal Itch Research Facility which orbited one of the lesser moons of —"

"Is she in, Glorijeane?" inquired the big writer, resting one abraded hand on her slick desk top.

"No, she's out somewhere or other, Jose," replied Glorijeane Golden, toying with the tokmike she'd dropped to her handsome lap when he'd come barging in out of the perennial rain. "Even though Lulu's such a workhorse, she may have gone home early to pretty up, although as much as I love her and working here for the Lulu Bumhouse Literary Agency and the Lulu Bumhouse School of Creative Writing, I wouldn't exactly say pretty is the word to use in connection with Lulu, except I never seem to find catpeople all that attractive, and that's, I have to

admit, a flaw in my character, for the banquet tonight or —"

"What banquet?"

"The Royal Academy of Literary Greats Awards Banquet," replied Glorijean. "We have fully six clients up for a Great In His/Her/Its Own Time Award, which I think is when they present you that hunk of plaz shaped like a grout plop except it's got a silvery dingus atop the —"

"Is that where Lulu is going to be tonight?"

"Possibly. Or she may have decided to hop over to a parallel universe. She's been doing that a lot of late, opening up all sorts of new markets in other dimensions." Pausing, she scrutinized him. "What did you want to see her about exactly? I'm near certain we don't have any new checks for —"

"About \$12,000," answered Silvera evenly. "The sum due me when I complete *I Found Manly Dootle*."

Glorijean's lovely eyes went wide. "Wow, I heard you were just about the fastest hack in the Barnum System, but you only went out exploring two, or was it three, short days ago, and here you found that poor lost archeologist and wrote a big pithy book and have turned it in, and you're already awaiting the acceptance check. I really admire your professionalism. Especially now I'm Dean of the Lulu Bumhouse Galactic School of Creative Writing, I appreciate an old pro. Did you know I'd been prom —"

"No, I didn't. Congratulations." He

bent to disentangle the twist of vine from his boot. "And I haven't actually written the book about finding Manly Dootle in the wilds of the Great Rain Forest of Tarragon."

"Why is that?"

"Because Manly Dootle doesn't exist."

The young woman blinked her fascinating green eyes. "But why then would Lodestone Books offer you \$24,000, half on signing, half on delivery of an acceptable manuscript, and a generous 10-12-15 percent royalty, to go out into the wilderness and hunt for him and then write a book about it?"

"That's one of the very questions I'm anxious to ask some representative of Lodestone Books."

She studied his person again. "It appears you've been doing something besides researching a book," Glorijean concluded. "You look as though you'd been shot at with a blaster, conked over the noggin with a rough-hewn club and thrown down a cliffside into a bog, if you don't mind my mentioning it. What, exactly, did happen?"

"All of that, plus a kick in the slats." He sat on the edge of her desk. "One of the first things I did on returning to this, the capital city of the planet Tarragon's Chuva Territory, was try to look up Lodestone Books. Their local address, however, is nowhere listed. I was curious as to why the guidebot provided to lead me through the Great Rain forest had been secretly programmed to assassinate me."

The young woman gasped. "Are you sure? I mean, what leads you to suspect that —"

"His three attempts to do me in pretty much convinced me," answered Silvera. "When I dismantled the bastard, I found the bootleg programming bug that'd been inserted in his works. That didn't, though, tell me who wanted me left to expire in the jungle."

"You actually know how to take apart a robot?"

"As well as how to keep one from killing me. On Murdstone once I ghosted a book called *The Ladies' Home Robotics Repair Guide*."

"You've written so many books, it's stupefying," she sighed. "I really wish you had time to give some advice to the dimwits who've signed up for the writing course. You wouldn't believe —"

"My only advice to writers is always make sure you collect."

"Oh, that's right, I've heard tales of your going to the ends of the earth, and beyond, just to get what a publisher owes you. Once you even pursued the Arends Brothers over into a parallel universe for \$97 in back royalties owed you for a Gothic romance aimed at birdpeople on —"

"It was \$297," he corrected. "Only one Arends Brother was able to run out, the others were laid up."

GloriJean stroked one charming finger across her chin. "Have you ever ... um, killed anyone over a fee?"

"Until now, no," he admitted.

"Since Lulu isn't around, can you dig up some kind of address for Lode-stone?"

"I suppose so, since it isn't confidential or anything, if we have it in the files, which we ought to, except I've been so busy being Dean and sending twerps all over the known universe polite critiques of the swill they think is —"

"Search."

She stood, smoothing her pale pink lycra dress. "You're just going to request the other \$12,000, aren't you? Since you feel they lured you out there on a false lead and that you acted in good faith and therefore are entitled to the full amount promised in the contract, less our 15 percent commission."

"I might," confided Silvera, "also ask why they were interested in killing me."

"Let's hope they don't treat all our writers this way. I mean, that would be a clear violation of the Galactic Society of Authors Repre —"

"The address."

She walked across the yellow carpeting to a computer terminal which squatted in an alcove. "How many books have we handled for you, Jose? I've been here a little less than a year, having decided about then I no longer wanted to be a sado-masochistic model for that line of bondage magazines on Peregrine, even though some of the shots of me appearing in *Naked Humanoid Flesh* were quite fetching for pictures in a magazine whose primary

circulation was among derranged toadmen who labored in the saltpeter mines of Venus. I suppose their interest makes sense, because if you've ever seen a naked toadwoman, you —"

"Sixteen."

"Hum?"

"The answer to your query about how many books I've had Lulu handle for me on this planet. Sixteen." He followed her to the squat terminal, limping slightly.

"Did they break one of your legs, too?"

"It went to sleep while I was perched on your desk edge."

"My left buttock often did that when I was a model. If you've ever, which I don't suppose you have, sat around on a torture rack wearing black leather underwear for hours and hours while they make sure the lighting is just right and —"

"Matter of fact, I did. While researching *So You're Going To Be a Masochist* on the planet Barnum three, four years ago." He touched her elbow, urging her hand toward the tokmike to activate the computer.

"What were some of the titles you did for us?"

"I wrote *Flatten Your Tentacles*. That didn't do too well except in the octopus quarter of Murdstone," he answered. "Also *Meteorology for the Masses*, *How'd You Like a Punch in the Snoot?* and a gourmet cookbook for lizard people entitled *Eating Worms*."

Frowning perplexedly, she turned to face him. "Are you certain about those titles? Because the authors of those last three are all up for awards at the banquet tonight," said Glorijeau. "I've been sending out publicity releases all week, relating how Lulu Bumhouse has so many prestigious —"

"I ghosted the books for those particular prestigious authors."

"Doesn't that bother you? Seeing the accolades of the crowd and the plaudits of your peers going to others, whereas you know, in your own inner —"

"Just so I get paid. Now find an address."

She picked up the mike, adjusted it and requested, "Address for Lodestone Books, pronto."

"You know what I'd like to do to you?" asked the computer in a panting voice. "I'd like to tear those flimsy garments from your nubile alabaster body, smother you in torrid kisses, abuse you —"

"Not now, Rollo," said Glorijeau. "Just the address, and real quick."

After an anguished sexual moan, the computer said, "The offer from Lodestone Books, as well as the initial payment, came from their rep in Chuva Territory, Mr. Gumbo Narz."

"Gumbo Narz?" Silvera scowled.

Glorijeau said, "How can he be a publisher's rep when he runs that exclusive restaurant that's become such a mecca for literary luminaries?"

"Narz' Word Processor Cafe is over

in the ritzy Drytown Sector," said Silvera thoughtfully.

"I imagine you've often been there, rubbing shoulders with your writing cronies, dining on —"

"Tonight'll be the first time." He glanced down at the carpeting, then bent to scoop up a matchbox. "I thought you quit smoking kelp."

"I did, that must be Lulu's," she said. "You aren't, and I ask this as much with concern for your well-being as because I'm anxious for the good reputation of the Lulu Bumhouse agency, going to beat up people, rend them —"

"Mention to Lulu I'll be checking back with her later." Dropping the matchbox absently into a pocket, he patted Glorijeane's stunning back and started toward the way out.

"About the computer," the blonde said, walking close beside him. "It keeps him functioning better if he can talk dirty sometimes. They call it venting in the —"

"I know. I wrote a book, *Careers in Computer Repair & Related Fields*, which covered that aspect." Leaning, he kissed her once on her smooth warm cheek before pushing out into the rainy dusk.

**S**ilvera leaped.

He delivered an uppercut to the scaly throat of the lizard man in the too-tight tuxsuit. As the final bodyguard dropped to the mat-floored cor-

ridor, he hopped over him and kicked open the sewdowood door of Gumbo Narz' private office.

Narz was an immense blue-skinned Plutonian and he was crouched behind his wide white desk. "That's really impressive." The kilgun in his azure hand was aimed at Silvera. "Taking out three bodyguards."

"Four." The big writer went striding toward the restaurant owner.

"I only employ three." Grunting, Narz rose up from behind his desk. "I sure hope you didn't coldcock some important literary customer, Silvera. The Word Processor Cafe prides itself on the sedate —"

"Who's Lodestone Books?"

"Now there is one reason you continue to be a second-rater. Your use of language," said the blue man. "You should've asked, 'Who *are* Lodestone —'"

"They owe me \$12,000."

"Surely, you haven't already written that ... oof!"

Silvera had dodged, suddenly, to the left, then chopped out with his right hand and sent the kilgun pinwheeling out of Narz' grasp. "I'm anxious to contact them."

Narz, face turning a deeper, richer blue, tucked his hand under his arm. "How'd you do that?"

"It's called Taisoom, an ancient Murdstonian martial art."

"Ah, yes, I read a most fascinating book about the subject, entitled *Taisoom: Religion or Weapon*. The illos

were muddy, which is why I didn't recognize —"

"I know, I wrote the book."

"You're Dr. Alice-Marie Heartloft?"

"For that book I was."

"Here I was contemplating inviting the lady to one of our Monday Meet The Authors luncheons."

"Where can I find Lodestone Books?"

The blue man took a waddling step backwards. "I am not at liberty to say."

Nodding, Silvera picked up the kilgun. He placed the tip of the silvery barrel against the restaurateur's middle. "Tell me who had you front for them and send me on that damn trek."

"You're behaving in a very brutish way. Your lack of sensitivity is yet another reas —"

"Who?"

"Well, it isn't actually a company."

"Did Lulu know that?"

"No, I fear I led the good lady up the garden path there," said Narz, running his tongue over his dry sky-blue lips. "It's some people who wish you well. Feeling sorry for your continued lack of success in the literary game, where you have to struggle along making only a few hundred thousand a year, they came up with this kind-hearted way of donating you \$24,000. Knowing your fierce pride, they realized —"

"Yeah, sure, that's part of it." Silvera lowered the gun. "Some of your

customers, the ones I've ghosted books for didn't want me in town while the Royal Academy of Literary Greats festivities were going on. Might be embarrassing if I happened to mention I wrote the books they're getting the accolades for."

"Well, perhaps that was also part of —"

"Which ones? Almost certainly Paxton Tubb, I ghost-wrote *Eating Worms* for him. Probably Socko Strong, too. Right?"

"They would prefer, Silvera, to contribute anonymously."

"And kill me anonymously?"

Narz' mouth fell open and quivered. "Kill you? I assure you not Paxton or Hasty or ... or the other concerned author had anything but your welfare in —"

"So there are three of 'em, huh? And Hasty Shimmel among them? Didn't think she'd —"

"Most green-haired women can't be trusted."

"Who's the third?"

"Well, it is Socko Strong," answered Narz. "The trio came up with the scheme while lunching here one day recently. I'm not exactly certain which initiated the notion. At any rate, they prevailed upon me, as a friend of literature and a patron —"

"The robot guide was programmed to assassinate me out in the wilds," said Silvera.

Narz held up both blue hands. "You have my solemn word, Silvera,



we only meant to decoy you and keep you out of town until all the awards had been handed out. Killing you wasn't part of —"

"Even so, I think I'll go talk to my three patrons."

"Your showing up on the night of the awards banquet might upset them."

"I sure as hell hope it does," said Silvera, moving for the door.

"Now here's a joint I'd like to live in," observed the aircab as it swayed down through the rain-swept early evening. "Life in Sunnyland Estates must be far from dismal."

Silvera grabbed hold of the floor exit-hole handle while his cab was settling down on one of the landing patches atop the vast plaz dome which encased the luxurious complex of private estates. "Myself," he said, "I like the sound of rain on a tin roof."

"In small doses, sure, but as a constant din twenty-seven hours a day, it can be depressing," said the voxbox on the control panel. "The cumulative effect can —"

"Nice chatting with you." Silvera dropped down through the belly of the hovering skycab and into a welcome tube.

That whooshed him around a series of pastel chutes and dropped him on fresh-seeming graz in the sunny reception area at the center of the domed estate grounds. Up above, a continually burning sunglobe beamed, giving

everything a noontday look. Blue butterflies flickered out of a flowered hedge, ebony humming birds hummed over nectarplants, unseen bees buzzed with implied content.

"Reason for your visit?" inquired a rumbling voice behind him.

"Calling on my old chum, Paxton Tubb," Silvera told the bronzed robot security cop who was rolling toward him.

"You're late for the press conference."

"So I am," improvised Silvera. "I was delayed covering the big knot-tying playoffs across town. I'm a roving editor for *Interplanetary Boys' Life*."

The cop's right arm made a *yunk* sound as he raised his hand, palm-upward, to the writer. "Put all your IDs atop my scanner."

Pretending to frisk himself, Silvera said, "Keep watching my left eyebrow, notice how it rises and falls, rises and falls like the inexorable tide. Makes you drowsy, doesn't it?"

"Not especially. Now then, lad, let's see ... say, now you mention, I do feel a bit sleepy-headed. Hadn't much thought about the matter until I commenced watching that fascinating eyebrow of yours. Odd in a way, since I'm constructed to remain bright-eyed and bushy-tailed around the clock each and ... Yawn! Excuse me for ... *Thunk!*"

The security cop had stiffened. His eyes snapped shut, his chin tipped down to bong his broad bronze chest.

"Zowie gee!"

"Lickety gosh!"

Two teenage girls, painted the shade of light orange which was currently fashionable on this part of the planet and clad in frontless funsuits were emerging from a clump of lotus trees.

"Hickety darn! How the dworkin did you do that, sir?"

Silvera said, "Simple mechanohypnosis. Now begone." He went striding off along the sun-bright gravel pathway which cut across the nearest rolling hill.

"Jickety gee! That's impossible, isn't it, hypnotizing a dworking machine?"

The two girls, orange breasts flubbing, fell in beside him as he climbed.

"Isn't anyone can put a robot in a trance," said the one with the candy-stripe hair.

"You have to read," said Silvera, "*Mastering Machines in Just 10 Days.*"

"Oh, poopity heck, I read that dwork of a book," said the bald one. "It was no help at all. See, if Peaches and I could mesmerize the security 'bots here, then we could sneak out after curfew and into Wetown to carry on all sorts of lewd affairs with men below our station and twice our age."

He increased his pace. "If you follow the diagrams, you won't have any trouble."

"You sure have a lot of faith in that frenkel of a book."

"I wrote it."

The hairless girl gave a surprised squeak. "You mean you are Swami Andika Katika Kitabu?"

"Sometimes." From the crest of the glowing green hill he could see Tubb's neomarble mansion and the acre of graz in front of its wide porch. There were media vehicles clustered all around.

"I would've guessed," said the candy-haired one, panting from the climb, "that Swami Andika Katika Kitabu would be a unvirile person of some lower class coloration."

"Nevertheless." He gave them a brief, bleak smile before setting off downhill for the mansion.

"... you press laddies exaggerate," tittered Paxton Tubb, jiggling in the glaz hammock he was half-reclining on. "We scarcely earned \$240,000 on the toilet-paper rights to *Eating Worms.*"

"Are we correct in assuming," asked the silvery android from *Earth System Time-Life*, that your delightful book will be also reprinted in a nose-hole-tissue edition on Murdstone?"

"All except the index," answered Tubb, who was a large lizard man in an off-white dazzlesuit.

Silvera was standing at the rear of the half-circle of fifty some live reporters, mediabots and critics who were crowded into the vast oval living room. He was watching not the questioners nor Tubb, but a lanky sun-burned human who sat at the edge of

the group, hunched in a plaz sling-chair. Quietly, Silvera went stalking over to him.

"Socko," he said in a low voice when he had his hand on the man's shoulder.

"Holy Hannah!" Socko Strong straightened up. "You're not out in the sticks, Jose."

"Apparently not." His fingers tightened on the author's shoulder. "Let's step into that kitchen yonder. I want to talk with you, and eventually Paxton."

"Hey, this is the eve of the big banquet, buddy. Soon as we get rid of these assholes, we're heading for the —"

"Let's chat." He lifted Strong out of the chair.

"I don't want.... Hey, wait now." He stuck out his prominent chin. "I was forgetting who I am. Hell, I'm Socko Strong, author of *How'd You Like a Punch in the Snoot?* The damn book's sold 26,000,000 copies in the Barnum System alone and, even though you know how tough it is to get reliable royalty figures from over there, it's supposed to be doing swell in the parallel-universe markets. Anyhow, Jose, I happen to be the leading authority in the universe on self-assertiveness. So, buddy, no swarthy hack is going to order me to —"

"I wrote most of the book for you, remember?"

"Okay, we'll have a little conversation," sighed Strong. "But I bet I take the upper hand in less than ... ow,

don't clutch so hard, huh?"

The kitchen was yellow and white, nearly as vast as the living room. On one of its large white stove units a kettle was simmering.

"Paxton's dishing out some of his famous worms after those jerks quit throwing dumb questions at him," explained Strong. "Funny, huh? I allow them to fawn over him and ignore me. Yet I'm an expert on asserting your —"

"First off, I want \$4000 from you and \$4000 from Paxton." Releasing his hold, Silvera crossed to the kettle and sniffed.

"In a grout's fanny! I aint't forking over any —"

"The rest of my advance for *I Found Manly Dootle*."

"You didn't find him, buddy."

Silvera lifted the lid and studied the simmering worms and spices. "Not enough cumin," he decided, taking a spice cruet off the floating shelf above the stove. "You think he'd know how to fix Worms Ala Tubb."

"Hell, the guy who wrote *Eating Worms* ought to.... Oh, that's right. You helped out on that book, too."

"Which is why you two laddies and Hasty got together to keep me out of the way until after you'd collected your awards," said Silvera, shaking cumin into the kettle and then replacing the lid. "You ought to know I never make trouble for a client, never try to claim credit for a book I've ghosted. The only time I ever grow angry is —"

"When you don't get paid," said

Strong, nodding slowly. He started to reach into an inside pocket of his glit-suit.

"Easy now," warned Silvera.

"I got a wad of cash in here is all, buddy." Strong produced a fat roll of trudollars. "Since I became a bestselling writer, I've taken to carrying around impressive amounts of —"

"Four thousand bucks is all I require of you, Socko."

"I don't see why you have to go around bumming dough, with that blockbuster of your own."

Silvera ceased counting the stack of trubux his fellow author had handed over. "Oh, so? Which book is this?"

Strong's shaggy eyebrows bumped together. "I forget," he said. "I'm pretty sure I heard someplace about a hot book you had. Don't you know about it?"

"Nope. What's the title?"

"I forget. Mention the titles of some of your recent stuff."

"That'll take too long. I'll find out elsewhere." He finished counting the money and tucked it away. "Now I want to know why you three arranged to have me killed."

"Huh?" The eyebrows collided again. "You're talking through your sombrero, Jose," Strong assured him. "All we did was chip in to keep you out of town. You know, once we heard you were back on Tarragon hustling freelance assignments, we got a little worried. We decided —"

"Somebody wanted me out of the

way on a more permanent basis."

"Jose, I swear we didn't want anything like that." He held up his right hand. "You have my word of honor, and I used to be an Interplanetary Boy Scout."

After scanning his sun-burned face for a few silent seconds, Silvera asked, "Who first suggested luring me into the jungle?"

Strong thought, then shrugged. "It wasn't me, I don't think," he said. "You know, for a guy who's so damn assertive, I never seem to be the one who first comes up with —"

"Let's ask Paxton."

"He's still busy chin-wagging with the press."

"Even so."

"Nope, I'm going to assert my ... Yow!"

Keeping his grip on Strong's upper arm, Silvera guided him toward the doorway. "Call Paxton in here."

"What'll I say is the reason?"

"Tell him his worms are burning," suggested Silvera.

**H**ow exciting!" exclaimed the stunning green-haired young woman. She was seated in a robot makeup chair, and Silvera had just climbed in through her bedchamber window.

"Were you the one, Hasty, who first suggested shipping me out to the woods?"

Hasty Shimmel frowned at him around the thin metal chair arms which

were making up her beautiful face for her. "What sort of greeting is that?"

"The kind I give to people who try to murder me."

"What?"

Bonk!

She banged her head on the hair-dressing hood as she jumped clear of the chair.

"You know I'd never even hint at having such a thing done to you, Joe." She placed both hands on his chest. "We've gone our separate ways, each in pursuit of.... Would you close that darn window? The sound of rain drives me goofy."

He flicked the shut-mechanism. "Ought to inspire you."

Hasty seated herself on the edge of her jellobed, pulled her neofur robe tighter, crossed her long flawless legs. "Joe, being the most popular television weather person on the planet of Tarra-gon isn't exactly a bed of meeches. At least not here in Chuva Territory. All it ever does in Chuva is rain. Rain on Monday, followed by rain on Tuesday, followed by rain on Wednesday. What's the outlook for the weekend? Rain."

"But that's where you excel, Hasty." He sat next to her. "Coming up with infinite interesting ways to say, 'It's going to rain again tomorrow.'"

"Oh, sure, the public dotes on me. They don't sense the anguish eating at me," she said, leaning against him. "Never to be able to say, 'Possible

clearing tomorrow, followed by sunny skies.' Thank goodness for my book. Until *Meteorology for the Masses* hit the lists and became a blockbuster, I didn't have any hope at all. Now perhaps I can give up the weather desk, carve out a career for myself in literature. Not as a grubby hack, but as one who takes pains with her prose, making each word —"

"I'd like an explanation of why my guidebot was set to knock me off," he cut in. "And I want \$4000."

"Joe, we were close once," she said, running slender fingers through her luxuriant green hair. "It pains me, almost as much as this frapping rain, to hear you accuse me of attempted murder. I also don't like to hear you asking for dough."

Putting his hand on her shoulder, he said, "You wanted me out of town."

"Lulu thought it would be the best way to handle a potentially dangerous situation," the girl replied. "I never believed for an instant that you'd make a public scene. You're not in this game for glory or —"

"Wait now, Lulu Bumhouse was the one who came up with the scheme?"

Hasty left the bed, causing it to quiver and wang. "Lulu has to look out for all her clients after all, Joe." She strayed over to a glaz table. "When she suggested keeping you out of town until the awards were safely handed out, I was persuaded it might be a good idea. Paxton and Socko were also quite

upset about your advent on Tarragon so —"

"They have the impression the plan originated with you."

"She thought it best if they didn't know." Hasty selected a kelp cigaret from a plaz box on the table. After tapping it on the box lid, she brought it to her lips.

"Here." Silvera rose, fishing out a box of matches. "You ought to.... Damn!" He was staring at the box in his hand. "'When You're in the Parallel Universe, Stop at Plaut's Inn!' Sure, that's it."

"Are you going to light my —"

"You owe me the \$4000." He patted her on the head, spun and ran for the window. Opening it, Silvera climbed out into the rain-filled darkness.

"Glory be!" exhaled the thick-set catwoman as she doubled over. She dropped her satchel from her left paw and her kilgun from her right. "I never thought I'd see the day when Jose Silvera punched a lady."

"Ladies who pull guns in the center of busy paraports I always smack." He scooped up the gun and the satchel. Opening the latter, he dropped in the former. "Cash in here. Looks like about \$1,436,000, Lulu."

"You've a keen eye for that sort of thing, Jose," said the lady agent. "Actually it's \$1,435,000 and change. You must believe me when I say I feel like a real rascal being caught about to pop over into a parallel universe with it."

Silvera said, "The money is mine."

She nodded, smoothing her whiskers with a paw. "You're always gadding about the universe, using a variety of agents and even, on some of the wilder planets, agenting yourself," said Lulu Burnhouse, glancing around the large tiled waiting room of the parallel universe crossover facility. Tourists and business travelers were thick. "I, in turn, have always been excellent at peddling subsidiary rights, especially parallel universe rights lately. When your *Flatten Your Tentacles* started to take off over there, I was tempted, especially by a fantastically charming leopard man some years my junior, to siphon your royalties into my own coffers and lie to you. I had hoped you wouldn't show up again on Tarragon until I had the loot all safely stashed over there, the books doctored and a cozy love nest set up in an out-of-the-way corner of the parallel world."

"When I appeared too soon, you decided to send me off on a one-way safari."

"It was for the good of several of my clients, Jose."

"Killing me was all for you, Lulu."

"Wasn't that a truly awful thing to do?" She put both paws to her broad face, began sobbing forlornly. "The thing is, even though it violates the code of the literary agent, I didn't want to give back this loot."

Silvera shut the satchel tight. "Let's call on the nearest Interplan Law Service office."

"You're sending me over, Jose?" she said, blinking. "Could you just allow me to slip away in the —"

"People who try to kill me, I might sometime forgive," he said, heading her for an exitway. "People who try to screw me out of money, never."

Glorijeane stretched, smilingly. "I truly love the sound of rain on a bed-chamber roof. Some people, though, claim it's akin to the Venusian Water Torture, that the drip drip drip after a time will drive you stark raving loony," she said. "Me, I can never get enough raindrops falling on —"

"What did Lulu's kin say?" Silvera was stretched out beside her on the oval airbed.

"Oh, I didn't inform you, did I? No, because we practically leaped into bed together the moment you stepped across my threshold. Well, they want me to run the whole agency while Lulu's in the hoosegow and all." Sitting up, Glorijeane hugged her naked knees and smiled contentedly. "I certainly hope you'll continue to be my client."

"Possibly."

"You were really very clever about solving your own murder, so to speak. How did you know it was —"

"After I talked to the three of them who sent me on the wild Manly Dootle chase, I was fairly certain none of them wanted me dead." He locked his hands behind his head and watched the rain

smacking at the one-way glaz on the roof. "Since Lulu was the one who'd initiated the scheme, she looked like the one who wanted me defunct. When I got a close look at that matchbox I'd picked up at the agency offices, it reminded me that Lulu was given to hopping over to the parallel universes. Socko Strong had mentioned my having a bestseller someplace and I got to wondering if maybe that someplace wasn't across in a parallel world."

"How'd you make sure, how'd you know she was going to be making a jaunt when she was?"

"Rollo told me," answered Silvera. "Your office computer. After I made a few minor adjustments to him, he was glad to tell me what the true royalties on *Flatten Your Tentacles* were. He also came up with the time of Lulu's crossover reservation at the paraport."


She frowned down at him. "When'd you fiddle with poor Rollo?"

"Last night, after you'd departed for the day."

"I was wondering why he's been talking with a lisp all today," Glorijeane said, stretching out again beside him. "Now that you have an extra \$1,435,000 will you retire for a while?"

He rested the fingertips of his right hand on her abdomen. "Nope, I'll keep freelancing from planet to planet."

"Why?"

"Because that's what I do," he replied. 

# Fantasy & Science Fiction

## MARKET PLACE

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# INDEX TO VOLUME 62, JANUARY-JUNE 1982

Asimov, Isaac: Science:		Keller, B.L.: <i>Flora</i> .....	June	83
<i>The Long Ellipse</i> .....	Jan. 137	Killough, Lee: <i>The Existential Man</i> .....	Mar.	34
<i>The Circle of the Earth</i> .....	Feb. 130	Kilworth, Garry: <i>Almost Heaven</i> .....	Feb.	120
<i>Whatzismam's Orbit</i> .....	Mar. 116	Lanier, Sterling E.: <i>Commander In</i>		
<i>Change of Time and States</i> .....	Apr. 133	<i>The Mist</i> .....	Mar.	68
<i>Read Out Your Good Book</i>		Letters: .....	Jan. - May	
<i>In Verse</i> .....	May 135	Linzner, Gordon: <i>Sand</i> .....	May	90
<i>Four Hundred Octaves</i> .....	June 137	Lundgren, Carl: cover/ "Swarm" .....	Apr.	
Asimov, Isaac: <i>One Night Of Song</i> .....	Apr. 68	Lupoff, Richard A.: <i>Documents In</i>		
Benford, Gregory: <i>Nailhalla</i> .....	Apr. 73	<i>The Case Of Elizabeth Akeley</i> .....	Mar.	126
Bishop, Michael: Books .....	Jan. 47	McCarthy, Shawna: <i>Starhaven</i> .....	Jan.	148
Boucher, Anthony: <i>Sorry, But</i> .....	June 73	McComas, J. Francis: <i>Sorry, But—</i>		
Budrys, Algis: Books .....	Apr. 25	(article) .....	June	73
Books .....	May 33	Malzberg, Barry N.: <i>Blair House</i> .....	June	109
Catalano, Frank: <i>Love Object</i> .....	Mar. 81	Books .....	June	52
Chadwick, Paul: cover/		Milton, Patrice: <i>Easyed</i> .....	May	109
<i>"Starhaven"</i> .....	Jan.	Monteleone, Thomas F.: <i>Spare The</i>		
Chesbro, George C.: <i>Poems To Play</i>		Child .....	Jan.	63
<i>In The Piccolo</i> .....	May 145	Morressey, John: <i>A Welcome Bit</i>		
Clute, John: Books .....	Feb. 31	<i>Of Assistance</i> .....	Mar.	93
Competition 29: Report .....	Apr. 159	Mueller, Richard: <i>The Chains Of</i>		
Connor, Mike: <i>The Night Stair</i> .....	Jan. 108	<i>The Sea</i> .....	June	120
<i>Stillborn (novelet)</i> .....	Mar. 4	Paul, Barbara: <i>Scarecrow Duty</i> .....	Mar.	104
Daglow, Don L.: <i>The Blessings Of</i>		Payes, Rachel Cosgrove:		
<i>La Llornea (novelet)</i> .....	Apr. 33	<i>Acrostic Puzzle</i> .....	Mar.	158
Dann, Jack: <i>High Steel</i> .....	Feb. 142	Petrey, Susan C.: <i>The Healer's</i>		
DeMarco, Rick: cover/ "Last Night		<i>Touch (novelet)</i> .....	Feb.	56
<i>On Dugan's World"</i> .....	May	<i>Leechcraft (novelet)</i> .....	May	6
Disch, Thomas M.: <i>Understanding</i>		Platt, Charles: <i>Starhaven</i> .....	Jan.	148
<i>Human Behavior</i> .....	Feb. 4	Redd, David: <i>The House On Hollow</i>		
Dorman, Sonya: <i>Star Stories</i> .....	Feb. 76	<i>Mountain (novelet)</i> .....	May	69
Dozois, Gardner: <i>The Sacrifice</i> .....	Mar. 31	Rogers, Bruce P.: <i>The Krishman</i>		
Eagleson, Duncan: cover/		<i>Cube</i> .....	June	96
<i>"Documents In The Case Of</i>		Roller, Howard: <i>Sergeant Pepper</i>		
<i>Elizabeth Akeley"</i> .....	Mar.	<i>Variations</i> .....	Feb.	22
Easton, Thomas A.: <i>The Bung-</i>		Russ, Joanna: <i>Souls (novelet)</i> .....	Jan.	7
<i>Hole Caper</i> .....	Apr. 79	Schmidt, Stanley: <i>Mascots</i> .....	Feb.	38
Effinger, George Alec: <i>Maureen</i>		Searles, Baird: <i>Films</i> .....	Jan. - June	
<i>Birnbaum</i> .....	Jan. 55	Shea, Michael: <i>That Frdg</i> .....	Apr.	124
<i>Opening Night</i> .....	June 59	Sheffield, Charles: <i>The Devil Of</i>		
Eisenstein, Phyllis: <i>Nightlife</i> .....	Feb. 88	<i>Malkirk (novella)</i> .....	June	7
Ellison, Harlan: <i>The Outpost</i>		Sterling, Bruce: <i>Swarm (novelet)</i> .....	Apr.	4
<i>Undiscovered By Tourists</i> .....	Jan. 133	Taylor, L.A.: <i>The DeCapo Copies</i> .....	May	65
Fiorance-Guthridge, George		Vance, Steve: <i>Last Night On</i>		
<i>Blackmail</i> .....	Feb. 78	<i>Dugan's World (novelet)</i> .....	May	41
Godwin, Parke: <i>Sergeant Pepper</i>		Walotsky, Ron: cover/ "The Devil		
<i>Variations</i> .....	Feb. 22	<i>Of Malkirk</i> .....	June	
Goulart, Ron: <i>Blockbuster</i> .....	June 147	Weiner, Andrew: <i>Station Gehenna</i> .....	Apr.	92
Grant, Charles L.: <i>Pride</i> .....	May 123	Yermakov, Nicholas: <i>The EMC War</i> .....	Apr.	144
Grant, Richard: <i>The Dream</i>		Yolen, Jane: <i>Neptune Rising (verse)</i> .....	Apr.	86
<i>Executioner</i> .....	Jan. 90	<i>Sun/Flight</i> .....	May	104
Green, Joseph: <i>Easyed</i> .....	May 109	Young, Robert F.: <i>Invitation To</i>		
Griffin, Russell M.: <i>The Tragic Tale</i>		<i>The Waltz</i> .....	Mar.	84
<i>Of Mad Tom (verse)</i> .....	June 71	Zahn, Timothy: <i>Houseguest</i> .....	Jan.	74
Haldeman, Jack C. II: <i>High Steel</i> .....	Feb. 142	Zebrowski, George: Books .....	Mar.	22
Hardy, David: cover/ "High Steel" .....	Feb.			
Hughes, Edward P.: <i>The Price</i>				
<i>Of Livory</i> .....	Mar. 52			

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